



DRAGON+

A Peep Behind our Homage to Elmore

Jasper's Game Week

Van Richten's Guide to Bagman!

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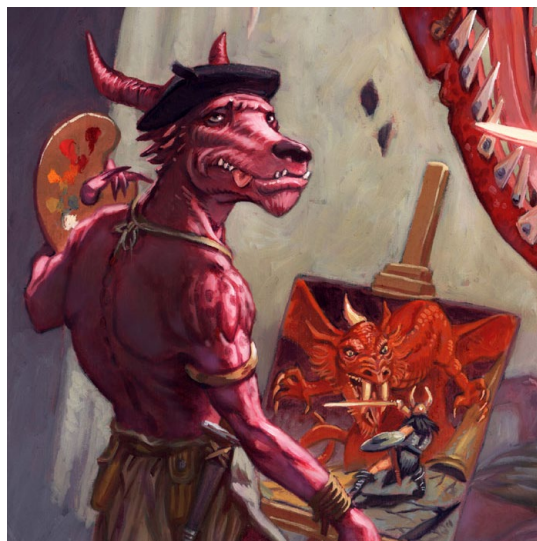
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ISSUE 37



Welcome to Dragon+ Issue 37

Senior Art Director Kara Kenna shares a moving story, in every sense of the word.

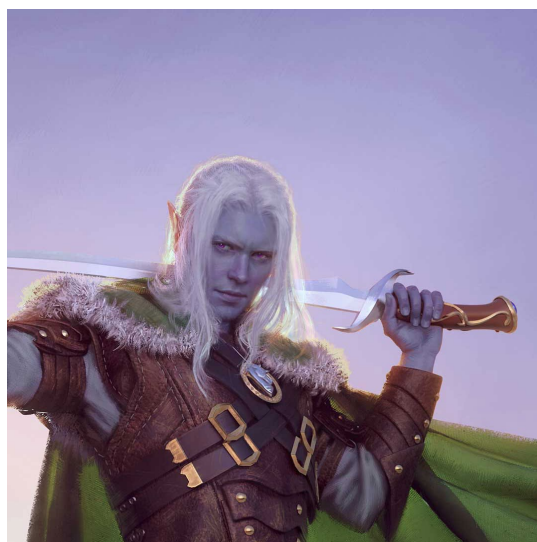


Imagining The Ampersand: Ralph Horsley

This issue's cover artist shares his love of crowd scenes and relives learning to draw in a pre-internet age.



In The Works

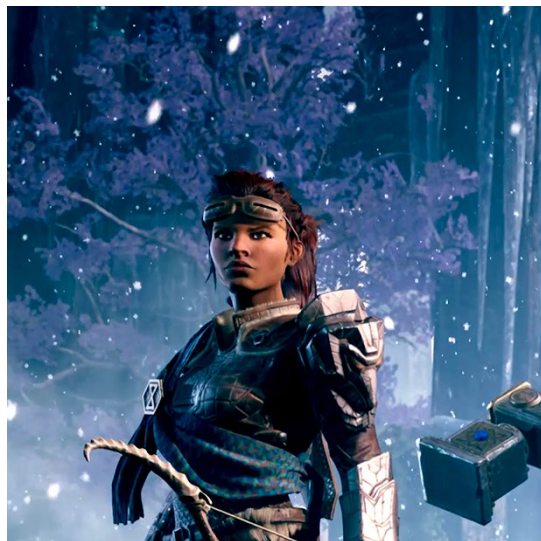


Beyond the

Continue our tour of the hot new products coming soon, including Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft and a host of digital D&D.

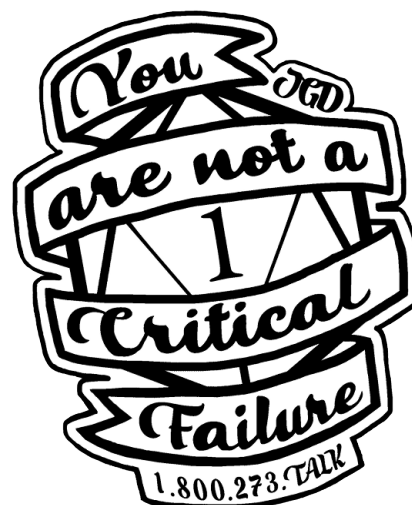
Underdark: Secrets of the Drow

The phrase “Forgotten Realms” has never seemed so apt as broader drow society reveals itself from the shadows.



Dark Alliance

The world of Dungeons & Dragons is about to come roaring to life as co-op action video game.



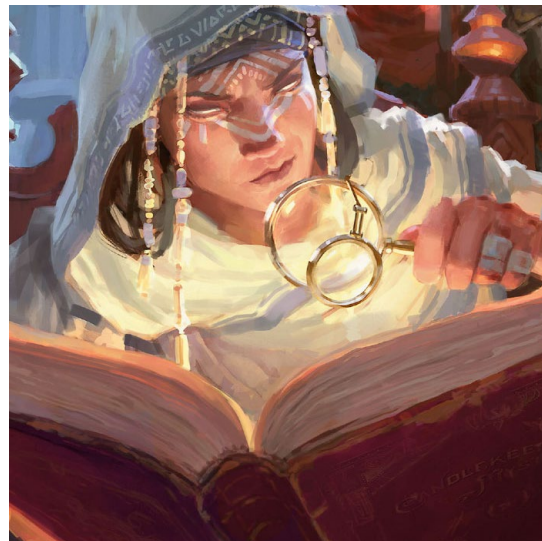
Jasper's Game Day

As Jasper's Game Day looks ahead to a week of fundraising events, founder Fenway Jones traces the history of the mental health charity.



Be Prepared, for Adventure

UK Scouts has partnered on an Entertainer activity badge that adds the roleplaying experience of Dungeons & Dragons.



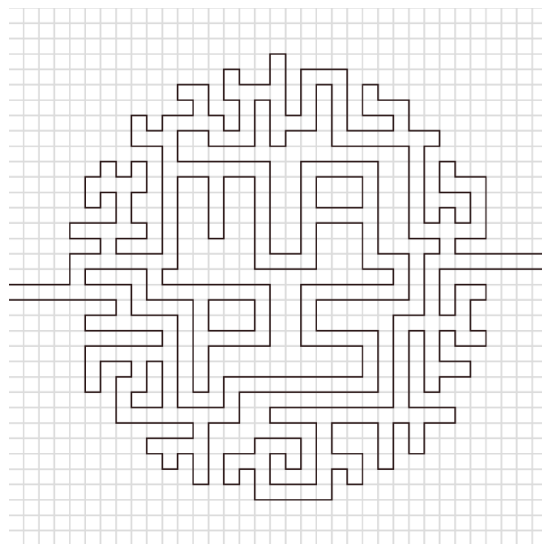
Community Poll: Candlekeep Books

Revealing the most entertaining new tomes suggested by D&D players in honor of Candlekeep Mysteries.



D&D Classics

It's not all dark and dreary even when traversing the most dangerous of dungeons!



Maps of the Month: Candlekeep Mysteries

Presenting maps and other art to help run your first encounters



Character Spotlight: NPCs

An undead order of shadow monks is here to destroy—or save!—the world.

The Best of the Dungeon Masters Guild

This issue we embrace the mystery in our roundup of DMs Guild content and get adventure writing tips from the Storytelling Collective.



Unearthed Arcana:Folk of the Feywild and Draconic Options

Play as a fairy, hobgoblin, owlfolk, or rabbitfolk and harness the magical powers of dragons.

D&D Virtual Play Weekends

Chris Tulach discusses how to play D&D online every month, whether you're using Discord, Fantasy Grounds, Roll20, or Zoom.



Streaming Highlights

This issue's streams showcase D&D personalities, a Ravenloft excursion, and a personal memoir of the power of storytelling...



Brian Perry

Our introduction to members of the D&D Team and their roles continues with the Director of Franchise Marketing.



Next Issue: Dragon+ 38

Magic is in the air as we go
behind the first Dungeons &
Dragons-themed MTG set...

DRAGON+ 36

Welcome to Dragon+ Issue 37

Senior Art Director Kara Kenna shares a moving story, in every sense of the word.



I'm Kara Kenna, and I am new to the party. I was thrilled to begin my role as a Senior Art Director at Wizards just a few months ago. Part of my job is to collaborate with talented artists to commission D&D artwork—including this month's gorgeous (and wild!) *Dragon+* cover by Ralph Horsley.

If you happen to be considering starting a whole new adventure—like changing careers and moving states in the middle of a global pandemic—I highly recommend it! Just be sure to make a Dexterity check first. There are beholders, frost giants, and Craigslist rental scams lurking around every dark corner.

Embarking on this radical new quest while sitting **alone at my kitchen table**, multiple states away from the Wizards offices has been strange. My desk **companions** sit in boxes for now and occasionally I feel like I'm lost in the Underdark. But my team has cast a *guiding bolt* to light the way. They have made me feel truly welcome—like I'm a buff-casting cleric joining the fight, ready to heal. And I know I will get to meet my fellow party members in person... someday.

I'm starting to feel stir-crazy and a little impatient. Undoubtedly you are, too. It's in this last leg of the journey, when your hit points are

low and you are fully encumbered when your companions are needed the most. Whether it's family, co-workers, or your D&D community, you can rely on your party for help while also making it stronger. We find ways to come together no matter the obstacles and openly embrace new adventurers.

I am quite late to this party. I am a little embarrassed to say that I played my first game of D&D only recently. Can you roll for regret? As a lifelong fan of fantasy, why I waited so long is truly a **mystery**, even to myself. It didn't matter that the game was virtual, the connection made to new friends and the world we are building together felt very real.

While we cannot control the roll of the dice (or the availability of a vaccine appointment), we can still make the most of every turn and reimagine what is possible. I think we all really need that right now. I couldn't be more excited to have a small role in building this epic world with all of you.

So, welcome to *Dragon+* Issue 37. I wish you the best of luck on whatever new adventure you are currently undertaking: may it be a new job, your first meal inside a restaurant in a year, or sending a character out on an epic quest with old—or, in my case, brand new—friends.

Kara Kenna

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Imagining The Ampersand: Ralph Horsley

This issue's cover artist shares his love of crowd scenes and relives learning to draw in a pre-internet age.

If it takes a brave person to reimagine one of the most well-known Dungeons & Dragons images ever produced, then Ralph Horsley has nerves of steel. He's become a dab hand at recapturing the magic of Larry Elmore's fighter facing off against a red dragon, which is famous for being the cover art on the classic 1983 "red box" Dungeons & Dragons Basic Set.



A detail of Larry Elmore's Red Box art (Select to view)

“When I first played Dungeons & Dragons, my friend Paul’s blue box predated Larry Elmore’s cover. But I was familiar with Larry’s work because my first copies were the three AD&D core books,” says Ralph Horsley, a fantasy artist based in Leeds in the north of England. “I felt a lot of pressure the first time I was asked to produce art based on Larry’s work, when the Basic Set was republished as a nostalgia version for fourth edition. But I also created another iteration that



Art by Ralph Horsley (select to view)

appeared in *Dungeon* magazine #210, which was designed to be a nodding reference. Titled *Stalwart*, it borrowed from the idea of the fighter with a shield in front of a dragon and I feel that image is a good interpretation.”



If you quickly glance at this issue’s cover image, you might think the pictured kobold artist has made a crude dragon construct to aid in his painting. But look a little closer and you’ll spot a number of other kobolds that are helping bring both the dragon and its adversary to life. Having multiple figures as part of a composition is something Ralph has long been comfortable with.

“A lot of artists might balk at a commission that includes lots of figures interacting. But this is just the kind of image I relish. I worked on comics back in my early twenties and that period really honed my drawing skills. I drew a page a day, with seven or eight different panels, for around five or six years. You’ve got to draw figure after figure after figure, so it forced me to work on anatomy,” he tells *Dragon+*. “They might be more work, but crowd scenes play to my strengths. Art directors know they can give me a battle scene and I’ll actually enjoy it so I suppose that helped me career wise. Putting in all those hours as a comic artist has really paid off.”

How would you describe your art style?

Usually, I’d describe my work by genre. It has a graphical element to it and I like to try and make things dynamic. It isn’t photorealistic. I do use reference material as I work, but I like the fact that my art is more stylized.

When did your connection to gaming first start?

I grew up in the small town of Kendal, in the Lake District. I’d always been keen on playing games, but when my best friend Paul was given the Dungeons & Dragons Basic Set for his 13th birthday, we started playing together and that was the start of my roleplaying journey. When Advanced Dungeon & Dragons came out, I bought

that. I didn't initially realize I needed three books so it took me about a year to buy them all. They were American imports so they were quite expensive.

Did you always want to be an artist?

As a teenager, I produced my own fanzine and was also involved in creating art for other people's fanzines. That was an avenue for art but I never viewed it as a serious career. I studied English Literature and Librarianship at Aberystwyth University but while I was on the course, I decided that I didn't really want to be a librarian. I had one small piece of work published in a roleplaying magazine that only lasted about six issues. They published my picture of an orc, and I got £50. I naively thought, 'Wow, this is great. I could try and make a living out of this.' I saw comics as a route into the industry and started working for those during my twenties.



Cover sketch (select to view)

It doesn't sound as if your university degree contained much hands-on art. Did you study art or are you self-taught?

I took art up to A-level standard at school but I've been self-taught since leaving university. I was interested in comic work, so I started out doing a lot of black and white line work. That was partly because I'd been so inspired by those early D&D images and I was really wedded to that look. Eventually I came to the conclusion that I'd

have to get into color to further my career, as that would lead to cover work.

The downside of being self-taught, certainly at the time, was needing to know the right questions to ask. I knew I needed to practice anatomy, so I'd go and get books on that subject. As I learned, I'd ask better questions. Let's look at composition or at lighting. Color theory and some of the more sophisticated elements came a lot later. It was a slow process but I got there in the end.

This would have been pre-internet?

At the time I was really dependent on the local library. A book on how to paint the colors of landscapes was very helpful for fantasy artists. Today there are a lot more resources online. You could take an online course or simply look up YouTube tutorials. And other artists put their work out there.

How did you get into the games industry?

It's funny how I would play roleplaying games and see their artwork but never see myself working on that. Then James Wallis, a friend of mine from the days of fanzines, set up Hogshead Publishing and asked me to do some work for him. He had the license for Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay, so Games Workshop saw my work just as it was setting up its Black Library publishing arm. Down the line, I met **Kevin Walker** at a Games Workshop event and he recommended me to Jeremy Cranford, the Art Director on *Magic: The Gathering*. From there I began working on *Dungeon & Dragons*.



Colour study (select to view)

The first work I did for D&D was with Art Director Mari Kolkowski on the 3.5 book *Serpent Kingdoms*. I started out doing interior illustrations, then eventually got to do cover work. When fourth edition came along, I got to work on core books such as the *Monster Manual* and the *Dungeon Masters Guide*, which was a lifetime ambition. It's funny to think that the 13-year-old version of me never even thought of that as a possibility. It seems so far removed from

looking at those nice black and white line drawings and trying to imitate the style of the different artists, to be actually producing that work myself.

What's your creation process like?

There was a point ten to fifteen years ago where everything looked like it was going digital and I felt like I was behind the curve. I thought long and hard about whether to switch over to being fully digital and I did teach myself how to paint digitally using that skill set. But everything ends up as a digital file at the end anyway. And at the time I was seeing sales of my original artwork increase, so even though it was supposedly taking longer to create work traditionally, the sale of the original art at the end of the process would offset that time difference.

I also fundamentally got into art because I like the physical process. I'd rather sit at my drawing board and get the paints out than at a monitor using a graphics tablet. Being in that physical space is very different so I made a decision to stick with what works and I'm glad that I did. I feel I can work fast enough and get the results I want. And if I need to, I can tweak it digitally.

How long does it take to create a piece of art?

In my twenties, I was quite impatient and I just wanted to get on with the painting—maybe partly because I wasn't as confident in my drawing skills. I felt if I sketched an image once, I'd lose something when I tried to replicate it. That version of myself would probably be horrified with how I work now!

Once I get a brief today, I doodle a few thumbnails. Often, I'll create a view from below, a view from mid-level and a view from above, as those give you three different points to start from. It's a good way to get your brain working. Then I'll work up two or three of those compositions that have a higher level of render and send those to the art director.

Once the artwork is a fully realized sketch, I'll paint directly onto it to do the color studies and explore different palette options. For this *Dragon+* cover image, I tried cooler colors against warmer colors in the foreground, and then tried a complimentary palette, with more yellows and reds. My younger self would have thought, 'What are

you doing all that extra work for? Just get on with it!’ But once I’ve done the color studies, I’ve already mixed those colors for the palette, which actually speeds everything up. When you’re working in oil, you can’t make it up as you go along.

Do you create large works of art for each commission?

I usually work about two sizes up. Normally, an eight-and-a-half by eleven-inch cover would end up being seventeen inches by twenty-two. On the commercial side, I realized that there’s a collectible market for the original artworks. I can even sell the color studies and the composition studies as there are people who collect revision artwork within the games industry.

Are you still playing D&D today?

Pre-lockdown, most Friday nights I’d go and play games with a group of friends, so I’m still an active gamer. But I don’t do much roleplaying these days, which is a shame. I tend to play more board games, such as *Lords of Waterdeep*, which I was fortunate to work on.

When you were roleplaying, did you have a favorite class, race or character type?

Fighters and magic users were always my favorites. I had a particular illusionist I was very fond of, but that was always a challenge for DMs because interpreting illusion spells is difficult. Race wise, I’ve always preferred playing dwarves. There’s something appealing about them. But I enjoy the talky side and character-driven elements of a roleplaying game over puzzle solving.

Have you ever been the Dungeon Master?

That was my favored role. Most of my stuff was homebrew. As a very keen roleplayer I liked the idea of pushing the format as far as it could go. In my late twenties and early thirties, the group I was playing with ran a lot of diceless or mechanic-free games that led to a lot of freeform roleplay. But D&D was the starting point for me and is still my first love. It’s shaped my whole career and I feel very thankful to have been involved with it.

You can see more of Ralph Horsley’s work on his [official website](#), buy prints at [Etsy](#), and connect with him on [Twitter](#).



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IN THE WORKS



PREVIEWS

IN THE WORKS

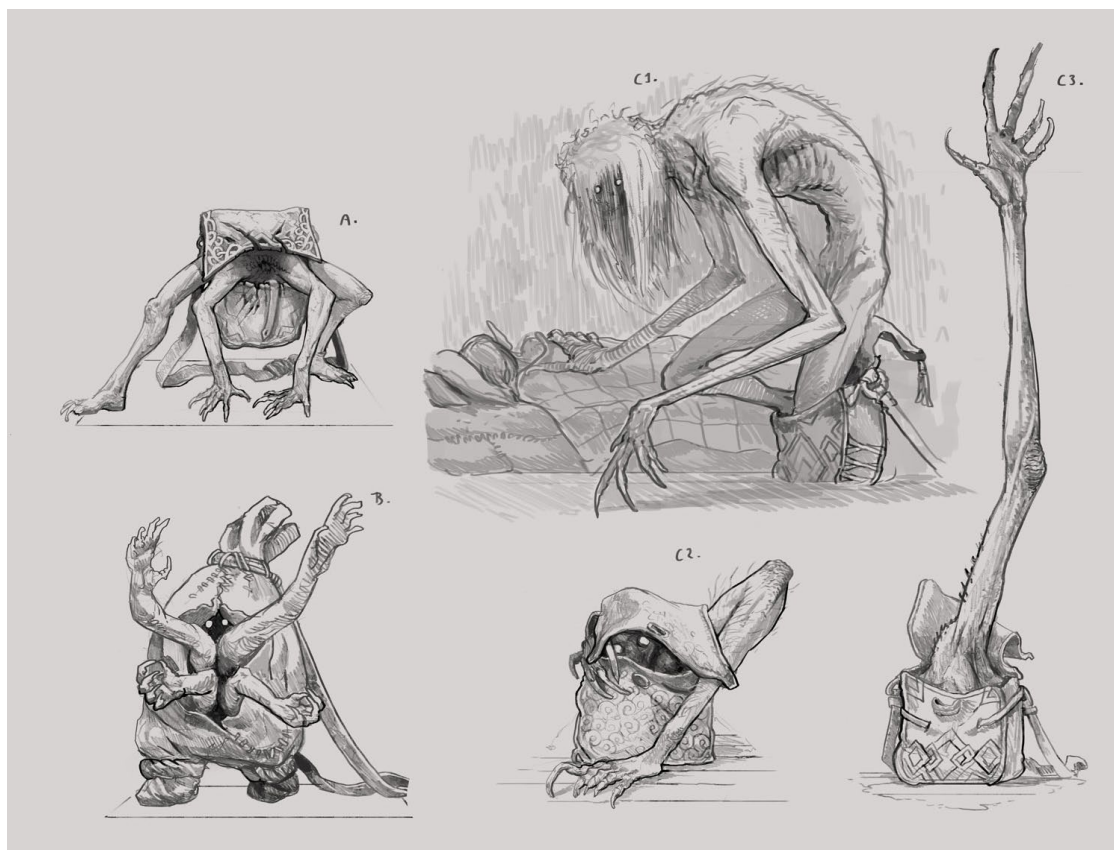


Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft

“I love horror movies. When [Senior Art Director] Kate Irwin told me that the D&D Team was making a horror book, I knew I needed to be a part of that. I was ready when *Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft* finally came around,” says artist Stephen Oakley, who describes his day job at Sony Santa Monica Studios as taking the ideas of game designers, directors, and art teams and adding “extreme” touches. But he’s outdone himself with the terrifying vision he’s created for *Van Richten's Guide*: a being known as bagman.

The concept started off early in the genesis of the book, with a conversation about creepy folklore, fakelore, and how terror tales that form from the mundane resonate. “D&D Concept Illustrator Shawn Wood and I were looking for D&D’s Slender Man, a terror that has always been there—always been right in the background—but that you never noticed,” says Senior Designer F. Wesley Schneider. “A being close to home for D&D adventurers, and one who once they know about it, they can’t un-know about it. The genie’s out of the bottle. The threat’s *always* there.”

Discussions then moved to adventurers—where they think they’re safe, and what’s closest to home for them. And what’s safer than their own treasure and equipment? “We hit on pervasive magic items pretty fast, and *bags of holding* were at the top of the list. There’s already a measure of mystery about how they work, where they go, and how they might be dangerous, so we wanted to make that even worse. Shawn had his first sketch of the Bagman pretty much the next day.”



(Select to view)

From there, the concept of a creature hidden within a *bag of holding* and who comes out to menace resting characters evolved swiftly. As Stephen began to develop the idea for the monster, he tried to imagine the worst possible way such a being might interact with a party.

“My brain started working overtime,” he remembers. “A bag that attacks you at random is already pretty creepy. But what if the bag allowed you to carry it around? And like an evil parasite, it was committing atrocities while you and the party were asleep in the towns you were visiting? The party might think they’re following a murderer but in reality they’re bringing this killer with them and they’re the problem!”

“And what if the party becomes paranoid that it’s one of their number who is doing this? Maybe this sneaky, evil being realizes that one of the party members is figuring it out so it decides to try and take them into the bag one night. That seemed like a fun mechanic for DMs to play with.”

Stephen felt that bagman should be an entity with high Stealth,

because nothing's more disturbing in a horror movie than when something horrible is in the background and the main characters don't see it. He also wanted to lean into the lore of a *bag of holding*. Usually, when you put a creature inside one of those, it doesn't live very long. While that didn't automatically make bagman an undead creature, it did suggest some unusual aspects.

“I feel if bagman was a simple zombie, it wouldn't be as intimidating. I've always enjoyed the nightwalker and what it represents—this unknowing, uncaring entity that might be immune to magic. And I've always enjoyed the idea of aberrations because they're just so *other*. There were some really broad strokes around the theming and most of them were to make sure the entity was as horrendous as possible!” he says.

“I particularly love it when you see something in game and think, ‘Okay, this is definitely X’. But then it turns out that it's actually Y—and Y is way worse! Anytime something in D&D plays into being a simple creature so the characters feel like they know what they're dealing with, and then flips that to show them they're completely wrong, that stands out to me. It's that fear of the unknown that's always fun to discover.”

Van Richten's Guide: Horror Logos

Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft uses a neat system of logos to signpost the kinds of horror that can be found in each of its Domains of Dread. Designed by artist Trystan Falcone, these logos highlight the sourcebook's primary horror genres (Body, Cosmic, Dark Fantasy, Folk, Ghost Stories, and Gothic), as well as its secondary genres (Disaster/Survival, Occult Detective, Psychological, and Slasher/Monster).



Icon: Dark Fantasy Horror

“I was so thrilled to work on this project and I immediately used it as an excuse to watch a bunch of my favorite horror movies for inspiration!”

Stephen's initial drawings played with the idea of bagman as a smaller entity, with shorter arms. As the potential space within a *bag of holding* is so large, thanks to its extra-dimensional qualities, he then shifted to imagine how big it could be.

“The idea of contortionists started playing in my mind so I gave it tall, lanky limbs that push the envelope. And I also imaged what this horrible entity might look like at various stages of its life,” he explains, adding that less can often be more when it comes to monsters.

“I’m from a small town that’s very similar to the one where Stephen King set *The Mist*. I love that movie because it’s more about how people deal with those kinds of horrors, and any monster movie that doesn’t show the whole monster is high up there on my list. The unknowns that you can play with, simply by hinting at a creature like that, is always a fun thing to pull on.

“That idea helped to influence bagman. The reason it has all that mangle hiding its face is to leave enough room for whatever people think is underneath it. It might be whatever they think is the scariest thing, whether that’s more man, more wendigo, more chihuahua, we’ll never know!”

Bagman isn’t the only incredible concept included in *Van Richten’s Guide to Ravenloft*. In the gallery below you’ll find the original sketches for the three **Gothic Lineages** race options, which featured as part of *Unearthed Arcana*.



Damphir

You can find more art from Stephen Oakley on his [Artstation site](#) and connect with him on [Instagram](#). *Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft* is released May 18, 2021 with an MSRP of \$49.95. Preorder a physical copy at your [local game store](#), bookstores such as [Barnes & Noble](#), or online at retailers such as [Amazon](#). Also available as a digital version at [D&D Beyond](#), [Fantasy Grounds](#), and [Roll20](#).

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IN THE WORKS



Silver Edition of Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft

by Matt Chapman

Something sparkles in the mist. A gleam among the gloom. For the briefest of moments that touch of class makes Ravenloft's deadly Domains of Dread seem a little more civilized. The glitz is suddenly complemented by the delicate silver trail of a blade in motion, followed by the bonk of something that should be attached to a neck hitting the cobbles.

An audible sigh emanates from the darkness. There's a reason this destination always features on the cover of *Volo's Vicious Vacations Monthly* thinks Beadle & Grimm's Supreme Marketing Goblin, as they shout, "Fetch me another mist talisman," adding after a brief pause. "And another influencer."



You'll know Beadle & Grimm's from its astounding high-end versions of Dungeons & Dragons sourcebooks and adventures. The company has produced everything from plushy hollyphants and incredible badges to hefty soul coins and maps detailing every square inch of Castle Ravenloft as it seeks to go the extra mile for DMs and players. And as it leads adventurers that should know better into the Domains of Dread, it's got a special piece of jewelry to show off. If it doesn't run out of celebrities first—do you know how long it takes to build up five million followers on a magical mirror?

“To travel from domain to domain in Ravenloft, you'll need a mist talisman,” explains Matthew Lillard, co-founder of Beadle & Grimm's Pandemonium Warehouse, as we get our first peek into the *Silver Edition of Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft*. “We had creative free rein to come up with a design for this key piece of jewelry as one didn't already exist. What we ended up creating is an amulet that's really badass. We think fans will love it.”



THE HOUSE OF LAMENT

When not producing jewelry that's as useful as it is fetching, Beadle & Grimm's goblins have been hard at work on the book's adventure. *The House of Lament* aims to introduce players to the horror aspects of a trip to Ravenloft ("5 Severed Thumbs Up!" *Volo's Vicious Vacations Monthly*) and the Beadle. & Grimm's team has added its own flair to the encounter.

"As well creating all the in-world handouts for *The House of Lament*, we've also created one item that's a staple of ghost movies: the spirit board," Matthew tells *Dragon+*. "That item plays a part in *The House of Lament* storyline and we've added our own to this box. We're printing the spirit board on canvas paper and we're making a planchette that you can push around as you engage with it."



BONUS ENCOUNTERS

In addition, for the first time ever with a Beadle & Grimm's product, customers also get to choose their box design! Four different designs are being produced, themed around four marks of horror from *Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft*: body, cosmic, folk, and gothic horror.



Beadle & Grimm's is also keen to add extra playable content to *Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft*. DMs can start players off in *The House of Lament* and then follow that up with four exclusive encounters in different Domains of Dread.

“Four members of our company have written adventures and they've all produced something totally different. We have an Egyptian-style encounter, a mind flayer encounter, a hold-down-the-fort zombie encounter, and a theater encounter that we think is hilarious, because we're all theater geeks,” Matthew says.

“If you play through all four of those you should advance to eighth level, which is a perfect level to be if you wanted to visit Strahd in Barovia. I'm dying to see if somebody chooses to play it like that, levels one through eight, because that's how it was designed.

“We've always created bonus encounters before, but we've *never* supported them with in-world elements such as battle maps handouts. This time we have. At the end of the day, we're a bunch of creatives and writers and one of the goals of the company is to become content creators. We want that to be a bigger part of Beadle & Grimm's going forward.”

Beadle & Grimm's *Silver Edition of Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft* costs \$185 and is **available for pre-order now**, shipping in July 2021.

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IN THE WORKS



Adventurers League Ravenloft: Mist Hunters



Something stirs in Ravenloft. And it's not master potion maker **Grabitha Grindleclaw**! The D&D Adventurers League has announced that its newest storyline campaign, titled *Ravenloft: Mist Hunters*, makes its debut on July 9, 2021 as part of that month's D&D **Virtual Play Weekend**.

Chris Tulach, Product Manager for D&D Play, describes *Ravenloft: Mist Hunters* as a different experience than previous Adventurers League games. Each of its adventures focus on story, social interaction, and investigation with a de-emphasis on tactical combat, making them perfectly suited to theater-of-the-mind play. Along the way, players will unravel a mystery that has far-reaching consequences, culminating in an epic confrontation with an

implacable foe.

While Chris confirms that *Ravenloft: Mist Hunters* is a horror-themed campaign, packed with atmosphere and immersive interactions, he says the storyline is being developed for a wide audience. Each adventure focuses on one or more subgenres of horror as a thematic anchor, as players explore several Domains of Dread—including some fan favorites! All adventures contain content warnings to help players understand if there’s anything they might want to discuss with their Dungeon Master prior to play. That way, everyone knows what to expect from the session.

The campaign is composed of fourteen adventures in total, forming what Chris describes as “a nice, tight narrative.” Two of the adventures, called Epics, will feature multi-group play and interaction, and those will bookend the storyline as the first and final adventures. The other twelve adventures are playable within 2-4 hours each by a single group. The sequential series of adventures includes meaningful choices that affect future play, with each adventure building upon the last.

Adventurers who take part in May’s Virtual Play Weekend, one month before *Ravenloft: Mist Hunters* launches, have also been promised a chilling experience. May’s event includes a special preview of *The House of Lament* adventure taken from *Van Richten’s Guide to Ravenloft*, which helps raise money for Jasper’s Game Day (more on that [here](#)).

“The preview of *The House of Lament* adventure from *Van Richten’s Guide to Ravenloft* is not part of the *Mist Hunters* campaign. But we’re looking to see if we can add a little bit of a connective tissue between *The House of Lament* preview and the start of *Mist Hunters*,” Chris tells *Dragon+*.

The upcoming [D&D Virtual Play Weekend](#), featuring *House of Lament* in support of Jasper’s Game Day, takes place on May 7-9, 2021. *Ravenloft: Mist Hunters* makes its debut at the Virtual Play Weekend on July 9-11, 2021. Follow the D&D Adventurers League on [Twitter](#), join the official [Discord server](#), or subscribe to the [Yawning Portal blog](#) to see more details as they’re released.

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IN THE WORKS



Warriors Of Waterdeep



It's been almost two years since *Warriors of Waterdeep* first began to conquer mobile devices, and since the traditional second-anniversary gift is cotton, we hope Stephen David Wark likes **socks**! We've been chatting with Ludia's Brand Manager since the game's **early days**, and as its second birthday approaches on May 30, 2021, *Dragon+* wanted to highlight some of the special celebrations the developer has planned.

Warriors of Waterdeep is a tactical dungeon adventure where a team of heroes assembles to fight deadly enemies. That challenge has already drawn many well-known characters from



across the Forgotten Realms, including such luminaries as Erin M. Evans' tiefling warlock Farideh, R.A. Salvatore's flamboyant swashbuckler **Jarlaxle**, and Waterdeep's Blackstaff **Vajra Safahr**. But it has also made superstars of its own heroes Halbenet, Shevarith, Naomlen, Tommus, and Coriolis.

Fifth edition players have previously been able to download **PDF character sheets** for four of those, with the most recent hero Coriolis Rillevay now added to that roster in advance celebration of this anniversary. We first featured gnome **Coriolis in *Dragon+* #34**, as the first sorcerer class hero to appear in *Warriors of Waterdeep*. She's described as a mechanic by training who helps run her family's clockworks repair business in the Trade Ward of Waterdeep. But as an artist at heart, she'd much rather turn spare gears into organic sculptures that remind her of the stars.

Those characters have four rarity types within *Warriors of Waterdeep*, and the game's website includes a fifth edition character sheet for each: Common (4th level), Rare (8th level), Epic (12th level), and Legendary (16th level). Created in partnership with digital toolkit D&D Beyond, you can also find the same versions of those character sheets by accessing them on the links below.

HALBENET SOLADONEL

Common
Rare
Epic
Legendary

NAOMLEN GIRDAUR

Common
Rare
Epic
Legendary

SHEVARITH KENDIA

Common
Rare
Epic
Legendary

TOMMUS TALLSTEP

Common
Rare
Epic
Legendary

CORIOLIS RILLEVAY

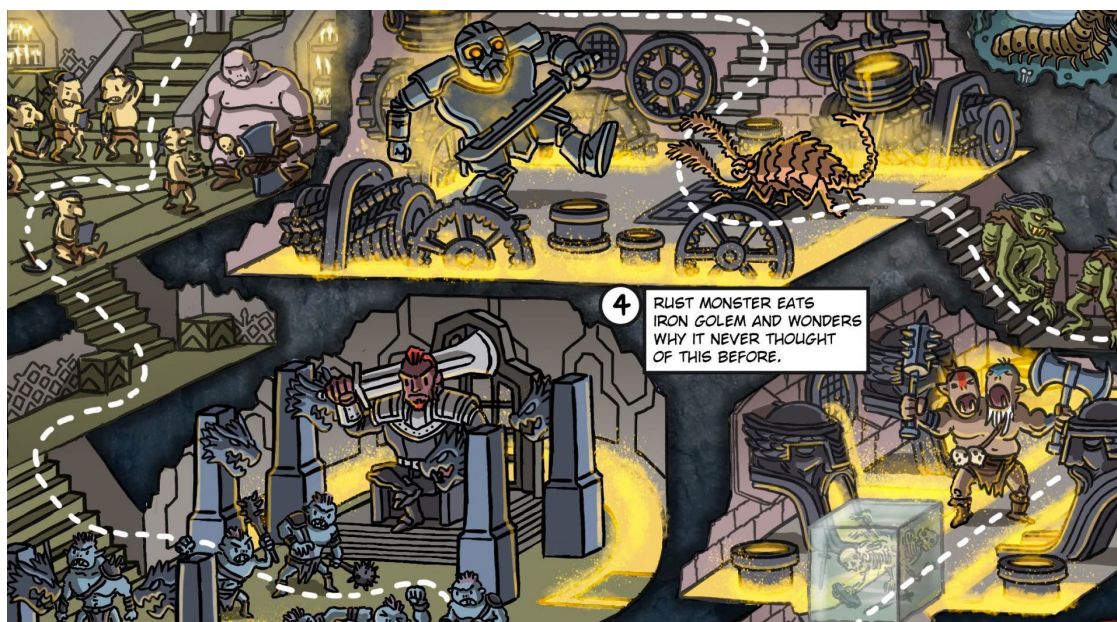
Common
Rare
Epic
Legendary

“It’s always a fun exercise in adaptation,” Stephen says of creating the character sheets. “Not only because the mobile mechanics and the tabletop rules that inspire the characters don’t always have direct equivalents, but because we have to leave room for the tabletop players to personalize the character as well.”



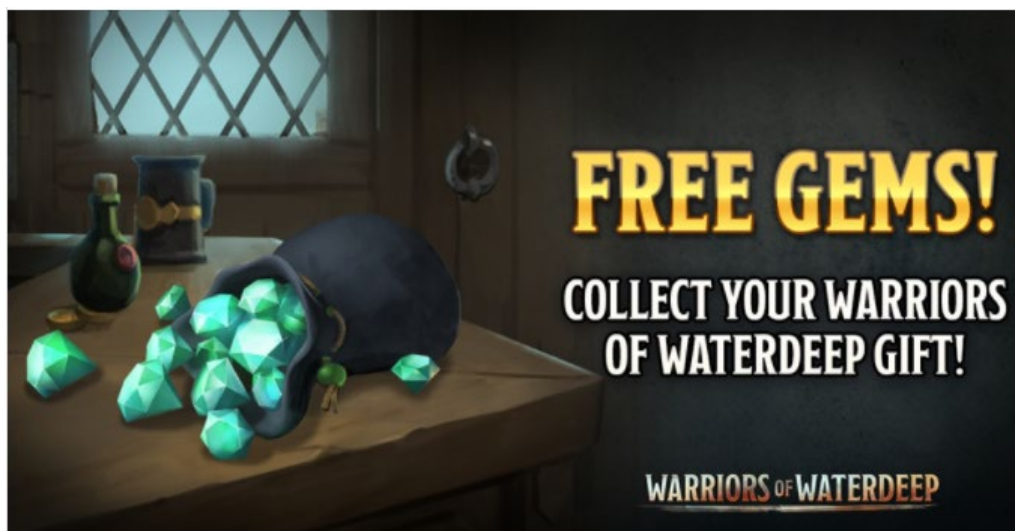
Coriolis (select to view)

Those initial character sheets were created by the Ludia team for *Warriors of Waterdeep*'s first anniversary, alongside a series of **wallpapers** given away as a special gift. For the mobile game's second birthday, artist Jason Thompson has created one of his signature maps featuring the five initial heroes. You can see the **full, hilarious map by clicking this link** and we've provided a snippet below...



Warriors Of Waterdeep is available now for **Android** and **iOS** devices as a free download with in-game purchases. You can follow the game on **Facebook**, **Instagram**, **Twitter**, and **YouTube**.

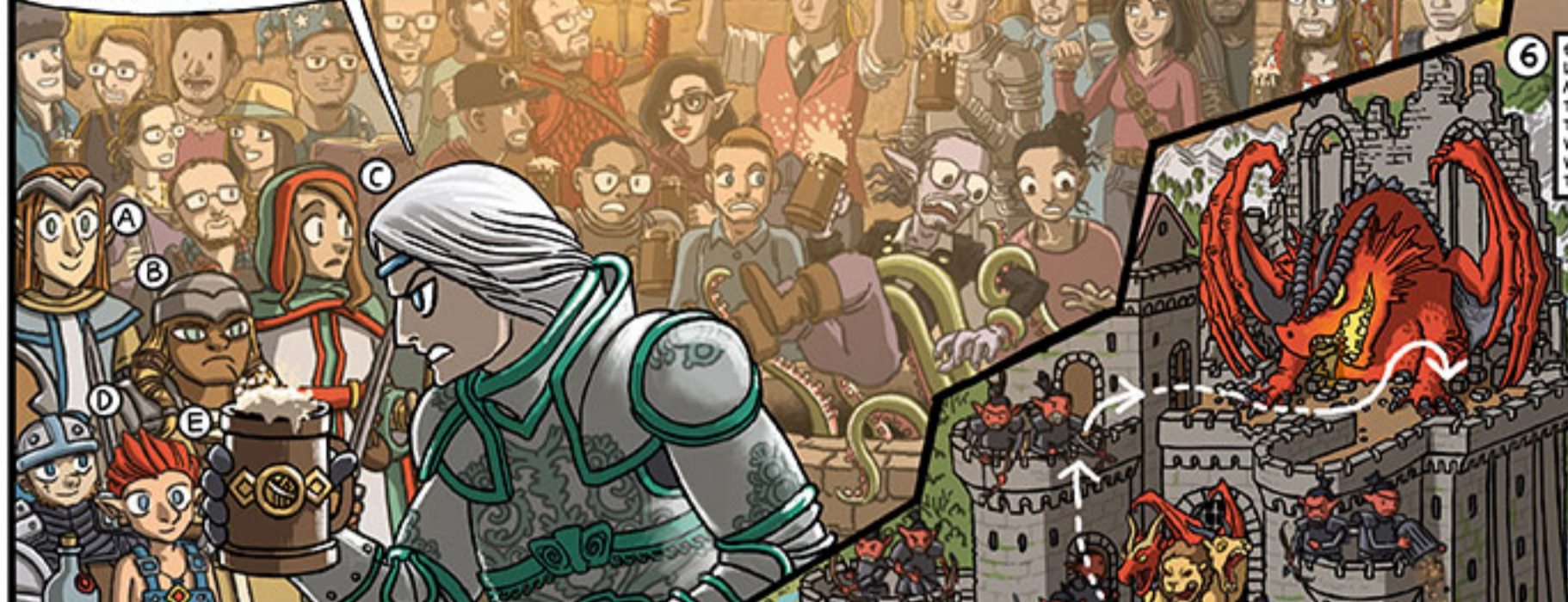
FREE GEMS!



Our friends at Ludia are gifting 50 gems to every reader who [clicks on this link](#). You must have completed your first battle in *Warriors of Waterdeep* and you must click the link on the mobile device where the game is installed, as it will open the game to deliver the reward.

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LAERAL SILVERHAND, HAVE GATHERED YOU FIVE HEROES AS PART OF WATERDEEP'S GIFT TO COMMUNITY-BASED ADVENTURING. BANDITS FROM THE NEFARIOUS BURNTBONE HORDE HAVE ATTACKED TRAVELERS NEAR OUR CITY. CHASE THEM BACK TO WHATEVER EVIL PLACE THEY WERE FIRST RENDERED!



- A. Halbenet (Cleric)
- B. Naamlen (Rogue)
- C. Shevarith (Wizard)
- D. Tommus (Fighter)
- E. Coriolis (Sorcerer)

START

1 IN SHARPSTONE KEEP, HEROES SLAY GOBLINS AND AN OGRE, WHOSE ONLY TREASURE TURNS OUT TO BE RACCOON PELTS AND A BROKEN STEWPOT. CORIOLIS RECEIVES ADVICE FROM LAERAL USING A CLOCKWORK DEVICE OF HER OWN INVENTION CALLED A "CELLPHONE".

5 ON HARVESTSHIELD MOUNTAIN, CORIOLIS BRIBES BURGERS WITH THEIR FAVORITE FOOD. BOTTOMLESS SEVERED TRILL FEET, HALBENET WHACKS GOBLINS WITH THEIR MACE OF DISRUPTION.

4 RUST MONSTER EATS IRON GOLEM AND WONDERS WHY IT NEVER THOUGHT OF THIS BEFORE.

7 IN HEARTCOOL DEEPS, ELCHARN AND CIELARZ'S UNDEAD ROMANCE TOUCHES EVERYONE, DRAINING TWO LEVELS.

3 IN HIDDEN FORGE, HALBENET RESCUES THE BONES OF THEIR COMRADES FROM "JELLO BURIAL" IN A GELATINOUS CUBE.

2 HEROES DISCOVER THE ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF FROST-SILVER MINING INCLUDES ANIMATED SKELETONS AND WALLS THAT PUNCH YOU. NAAMLEN FIGURES OUT HOW TO STAB THE INTERNAL ORGANS OF AN EARTH ELEMENTAL.

6 SHEVARITH'S FIREBALLS AND CORIOLIS' IMPROVED EXPLOSIVE DEVICES FORCE WIDLOVEY'S LEGION TO RETREAT. TOMMUS SLAYS ARSATHAKUL, AND THROWS ITS BODY DOWN THE MOUNTAIN WHERE IT CRUSHES THE GOBLINS WHO WERE STILL FLOPPING AROUND IN THEIR DEATH THRICES FROM EARLIER.

8 NAAMLEN FIGURES OUT HOW TO STAB THE INTERNAL ORGANS OF A DRINKING FOUNTAIN.

10 IN FORESTFALL FEN, LIZARDFOLK CAPTURE THE HEROES AS A BANQUET FOR VORAZIDRAR, EXCEPT TOMMUS, WHO HIDES UNDER A NAPKIN AND ESCAPES DISGUISED AS A MEENLOCK.

14 THE WARRIORS SETTLE AMONG FRIENDS AT LUDIA, AND JOIN THE VIBRANT MOBILE GAMING CULTURE. HALBENET AIDS OTHERS WITH THE MAGIC OF HUMAN RESOURCES, TOMMUS COACHES AT THE GYM, CORIOLIS DOMINATES AT POOL, AND SHEVARITH LEARNS THE FRENCH FOR "LIGHTNING BOLT" AND "FIREBALL."

9 THE HEROES ARE STUNNED BY THE WEALTH IN LIGHTNINGER ESTATE. TOMMUS REFLECTS THAT LAERAL ONLY PAYS THEM \$10 GOLD PER STORY QUEST. SHEVARITH USES HER WAND OF LIGHTNING BOLTS TO KILL KURSGALOTH WITH GOLD ELECTROPLATING.

13 PINNED BY WHITE DRAGONS AND FROST GIANTS, SHEVARITH FIREBALLS THE MOUNTAIN, CAUSING AN AVALANCHE THAT FREEZES EVERYBODY. AFTER MANY YEARS, CLIMATE CHANGE UNFREEZES THE REMAINING REVIVE POTION, WHICH DRIPS ON HALBENET, WHO REVIVES THE OTHERS AGAIN. FAR FROM THE WORLD THEY KNEW, THE WARRIORS CROSS OVER THE SPINE OF THE WORLD TO A MAGICAL LAND CALLED "CANADA".

12 THE HEROES HEAD NORTH TO SHIMMERBY VALLEY, FOLLOWING AN UPDATED MAP SENT BY LAERAL.

11 TOMMUS BUYS TWO REVIVE POTIONS FROM A PASSING MERCHANT, CONVINCING LIZARDFOLK IT IS A "MARNADE." HE TRICKS THEM INTO POURING IT ON HALBENET, WHO REVIVES THE OTHERS. SHEVARITH FIREBALLS THE DRAGON.

FINISH

15 AFTER STABBING THE INTERNAL ORGANS OF A FOOTBALL MACHINE, AN ELEVATOR, AND MANY SALADS, NAAMLEN WILL NOT REST UNTIL SHE DEFEATS EVERY GHOST IN THE MAGIC BOX.

WARRIORS OF WATERDEEP

Story by Stephen David Wark & Jason Bradley Thompson • Art by Jason Bradley Thompson (@mockman)
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 IN THE WORKS



Heroes and Villains

Grab your sword, spellbook and... cell phone! Pop culture clothing brand **Heroes & Villains** is launching an interactive Dungeons & Dragons adventure that functions entirely over SMS. Set to debut on May 14, the campaign's opener comes packed with puzzles and enemy encounters, and is set in a classic D&D setting: the deadly dungeon.

“The first story is essentially a dungeon crawl and your objective is simply to make your way out safely,” says Trey Swartz, Director of Marketing for Heroes & Villains’ parent company Bioworld.

“Without spoiling anything, the story opens with your character waking up only knowing it’s cold and dark. There are a series of pre-class story choices and then players will choose an option that sees them progress as a rogue, wizard, fighter, or cleric.”

Heroes & Villains (with **officially-licensed D&D apparel and accessories** ranging from **Drizzt** shirts and Volo hats to snug loungewear and d20 throw blankets) is offering rewards to every adventurer who braves the dark depths of its inaugural SMS adventure.



“In this first iteration everyone will receive a basic reward, but we’ll have monetary prizes for the grand prize and runner-up winners as well,” Trey reveals. “Prizes for this first story will be determined

by a random number generator, not choices or performance.”

While Heroes & Villains currently only operates within the United States, the company is hoping to open the SMS campaign to as many participants as possible.

Penned by professional creative writer and keen DM Landon Swartz, the dungeon delve is the first in a series of interactive adventures planned by Heroes & Villains, with the clothing line working alongside the D&D Team to grow the scope of upcoming text quests.

“We work closely with the D&D Team on all initiatives,” Trey says. “In the future as new Dungeons & Dragons content is released, we plan to create stories and adventures based on that content and will hopefully release them in tandem.”

The Dungeons & Dragons SMS adventure launches on May 14, 2021 and you can visit the [Heroes & Villains](#) website for more details.

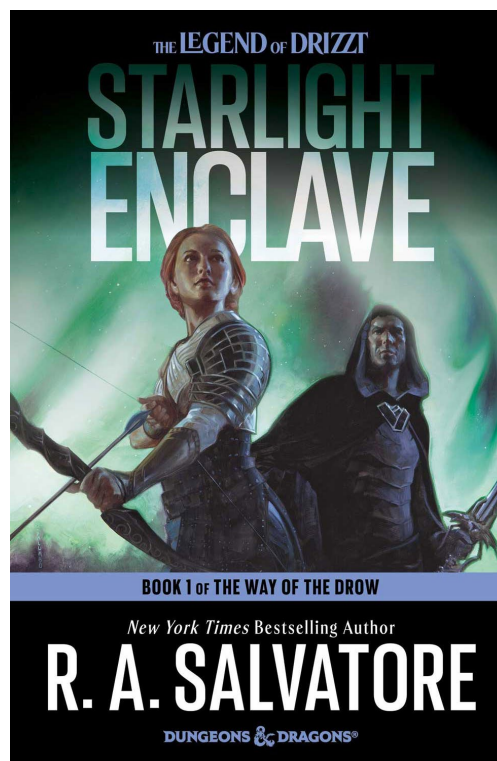
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 IN THE WORKS



In the Works: Starlight Enclave

When Dungeons & Dragons fans turn their minds to the drow, one name is likely foremost in their thoughts: Drizzt Do'Urden. Created by *New York Times* bestselling author **R.A. "Bob" Salvatore**, Drizzt is the most famous figure from drow society and it's through this ranger's eyes that so many of us have experienced their mysterious Underdark civilization. If you assume Drizzt would be party to some exciting news concerning the drow's place in the Forgotten Realms, you'd be right.



(select to view)

Upcoming novel *Starlight Enclave* kicks off a new trilogy featuring Drizzt and the Companions of the Hall. And if the drow ranger had thought that facing the followers of Lolth in the Underdark city of Menzoberranzan meant that he understood his complete heritage, it may be a shock to discover that there are at least two previously unknown factions of drow for him to connect to, neither of which has ever taken a trek to the Underdark or raised a prayer to a deity with eight legs.

“I didn’t create the drow, but I created the drow in the Realms. And the vision I’ve always had for them is where the Wizards Franchise

Team is taking them now,” Bob tells *Dragon+*. “I don’t believe we’re retrofitting. Menzoberranzan isn’t changing, we’re simply putting it in context.”

“When I originally built the city of Menzoberranzan, it was based on the five families of New York. We are now expanding Menzoberranzan’s lore to explain that the city was created when Lolth tricked a faction of drow to follow her into the Underdark. What’s that great line in *Sympathy for the Devil*? ‘I watched with glee while your kings and queens fought for ten decades for the gods they made.’ Lolth promised them a democratic, egalitarian meritocracy, independent of the whims of kings and queens. She told them they could be free down there, away from the actions of rulers who suddenly decide they want to go to war.”

As it turned out, the Spider Queen’s promises were hollow and her intention was to further indoctrinate those drow that followed her. The society she imposed on them was harsh and unforgiving, and the drow who flourished within it were seen as evil by most of the Forgotten Realms’ other inhabitants. With the other drow factions hidden from the world, that became the overriding opinion of the entire drow subset of elves. It’s a mindset Bob would like to change.

“The drow in Menzoberranzan aren’t inherently evil, they were corrupted by an evil goddess. Drizzt’s sister wasn’t evil. Drizzt’s father wasn’t evil. But people who live under a certain type of regime can do evil things. We’ve seen that in our own history, time and time again,” he explains.

“In real-world history, if you have a secluded society that’s gone way off the rails and a tyrant has taken control, eventually that tyrant’s going to die. In this instance, it’s not a tyrant, it’s an eternal goddess. How do you break away from that?”

“But when you look at what the drow are accused of, and you look at what happens elsewhere in the Realms, evil is a perspective thing. In my books, the humans do things that are much worse than the drow. At the Prisoners’ Carnival in Luskan, they’re torturing people over minor crimes for the pleasure of the audience. He stole a loaf of bread, let’s cut his hands off. Everybody cheers! What’s good about that?”

The trilogy that opens with *Starlight Enclave* offers a fresh start for new readers, as the series will provide an update on the activities of the Companions of the Hall, while also resolving events in the Underdark drow city.

“I have things I need to accomplish over the course of these three books. Menzoberranzan is on the edge of a civil war because house Baenre has committed the greatest heresy ever,” Bob says, revealing that he’s currently finishing book two. While he has plotted out the events of the three-part story, he admits that even the best laid plans can evolve.

“As far as the particulars go, my plans change chapter to chapter, never mind book to book. Sometimes they change page to page. When I wrote *Demon Wars*, I had a complete outline for all six books—which wound up being seven books—because I was trying to sell the whole series. Years later, when I was cleaning out my office and sending material to my alma mater, I found the original *Demon Wars* outline. Of the twenty characters featured in the final two books, only one of them was still alive in that outline. So, you know, things change.”

With Drizzt being such a household name, might this trilogy add a few new stars from the expanding drow world?

“The drow are hugely popular and readers will be getting some new characters in these books. There are a few of those that I adore and it’s my hope that they’ll be seen as potential NPCs.”

R.A. Salvatore’s latest novel, *Starlight Enclave*, publishes August 19, 2021 and is [available for pre-order now](#). You can find more information on Drizzt Do’Urden and the Companions of the Hall at [legendofdrizzt.com](#). You can also team up to play as Drizzt and the Companions in the action co-op video game *Dark Alliance*, released June 22, 2021. Visit the dedicated Amazon hub to find novels, action figures, and other expressions of Drizzt and his friends, foes, and adventures.

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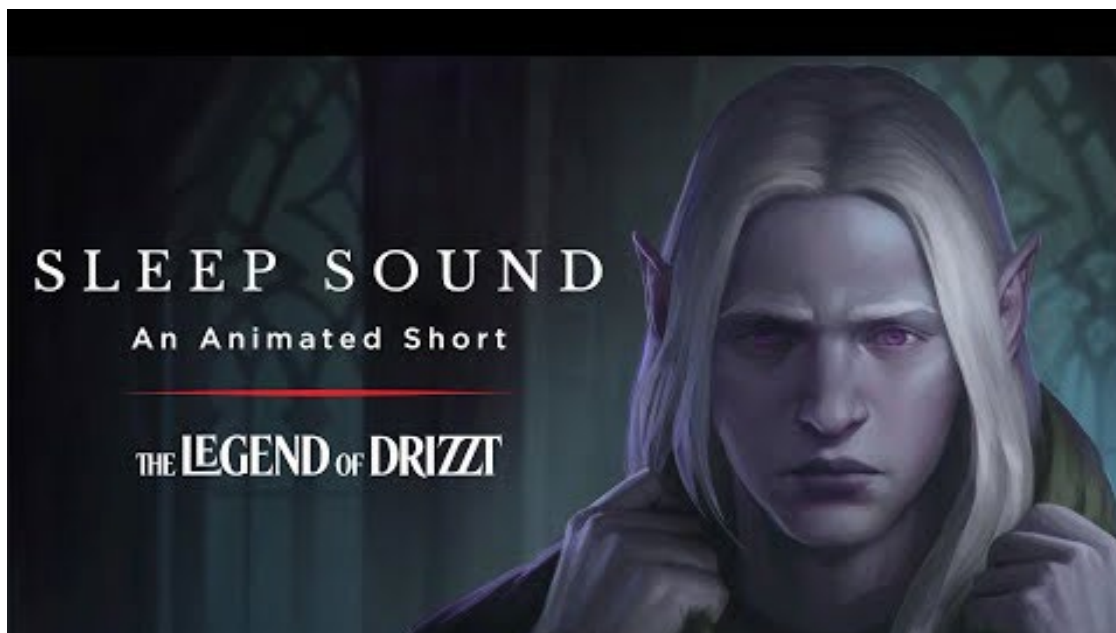
Beyond the Underdark: Secrets of the Drow

The phrase “Forgotten Realms” has never seemed so apt as broader drow society reveals itself from the shadows.

In the Legend of Drizzt, it is a widely accepted fact that the story of the drow and the story of Lolth are one in the same. Everyone—aboveground and below—knows that all drow elves live in the Underdark and worship the Spider Queen.

And everyone... is wrong.

Many D&D fans’ first experience of the drow world will have been through the eyes of its most famous son, Drizzt Do’Urden. As new areas of the drow world are revealed for the first time, Drizzt and his companions are being reintroduced to the world in *Sleep Sound*, an animated short narrated by Benedict Cumberbatch and written by R.A. Salvatore (learn more about the creation of *Sleep Sound* below). Watch as we experience the beginning of drow society again... for the first time.



In the Legend of Drizzt, Lolth has always been synonymous with the drow, and for good reason. This cruel goddess was among the first primal elves and when she spun her web of lies millennia ago, she ignited a divine war between elven gods. Rebelling against her creator, Lolth led a group of drow into the Underdark to build Menzoberranzan, the great cave structure known as the City of Spiders.



To learn more about Callidae, visit legendofdrizzt.com

Over millennia, Lolth’s teachings have corrupted this “udadrow” society into one that values cruelty, obedience, and a burning hatred of surface dwellers. Her stranglehold over it is now total. Young

warriors raid surface villages, proving their worth by killing their inhabitants. Lolthian udadrow have come to refer to only themselves as drow, disavowing the notion that other drow elves even exist, as all knowledge of their kind who remained aboveground has been eradicated from their histories.

While these actions drove a wedge into the family tree of elvenkind, the drow that built Menzoberranzan are but a splinter group. The Forgotten Realms is about to learn a truth that has remained secret since Lolth's initial betrayal.

“The spider-inspired ‘udadrow’ expression of the drow elves that D&D fans currently know is based on Lolth's influence over a pocket of elves who became isolationist, cutting themselves off from the rest of drow culture,” explains Franchise Creative Director Jeremy Jarvis. “There are whole societies of drow that did not follow Lolth into the Underdark. Two such groups are the ‘aevendrow’ and the ‘lorendrow’, or the starlight elves and the greenshadow elves respectively.”

It is believed that in the years following Lolth's schism, some of the drow elves who remained aboveground followed their moral compasses north, vanishing from history behind curtains of snow, aurora, and illusion. They became the aevendrow, a secretive clan steeped in powerful magic. The memory of their glittering bastion of Callidae somehow escapes even the longest-lived of elves. What life is like within Callidae's borders, and what mysteries have been guarded through centuries of storm and strife, remain unknown.



To learn more about Saekolath, visit legendofdrizzt.com

Another band of uncorrupted drow which remained aboveground are believed to have sought a new homeland within the towering forests to the south. Certain historians imagine these ‘lorendrow’ to be living in a verdant city that straddles rivers with airy bridges and winds around trunks as grand as cathedrals. Considered in many circles to be a case of scholastic fancy gone rogue, these historians have named the lorendrow homeland Saekolath—or “Place of Shade”.

DEFINING THE DROW

As the world of the drow has expanded in the Legend of Drizzt, their appearance has also been revisited. Led by Principal Concept Artist Lake Hurwitz, a group of artists explored the drow’s physical characteristics, as well as their clothing, weaponry and architecture. “We needed to ensure that the drow would read as a fantastical, living group of elves. As beautiful and otherworldly as they are nuanced,” Jeremy says, as Art Director Daniel Ketchum adds, “One of the very first things we did is explore lividity and temperature zones in the appearance of all drow. Adding these areas of warmth to their features communicates that they are living, breathing beings with beating hearts.”

One of the Franchise art team’s key tasks when expanding drow society was to differentiate between those elves who remained on the surface and those who followed the Spider queen into the Underdark all those centuries ago. The challenge wasn’t simply to align the

udadrow visually with Lolth in a way that went beyond their clothing and architecture, it was to make a distinction between the drow who are onboard with Lolth's agenda and those who were not susceptible to her corrupting influence.

"Drow elf skin is clear of any markings as a rule," Lake says. "Lolth is the corruptor and her markings, Lolth's Embrace, are visual evidence of that corruption. And not every drow has them. Lolth cult members are 'gifted' those markings as a result of their connection to the deity. It was an opportunity to introduce more of the spider theme in a visual way."



To learn more about Malice, visit legendofdrizzt.com

"Any Drow that has Lolth's favor gets these markings that creep up over the skin. The more you embrace her teachings, the more pronounced those markings become. But if you fall out of favor, they start to fade," Daniel adds, revealing that only Lolth's personal connection can add the marks. "You'll see Malice Do'Urden has very pronounced markings but it's not a family trait because her son Drizzt is seen without them."

“We always knew that Lolth’s corruption would be a spider motif, we just didn’t know how we were going to express that. Leaning into the spider aesthetic, those creatures’ markings can be brightly colored and often resemble shapes such as skulls or droplets. We decided instead that we wanted lighter markings to contrast against the drow skin tone and as these markings develop, they would begin to combine with spider legs and spider eyes. Malice in particular has an amalgamation of web-like, fang-like, but also leg-like shapes,” Lake says.

“Those have been expressed in a really beautiful way. When Lolth adorns her followers, those markings are always going to accentuate the beauty of the person that they’re placed upon. They’re going to flow with that person’s features and the way that they carry themselves. And those markings will be specific to that person because Lolth favors everyone in different ways.”



DRIZZT AND THE DROW

The star of numerous novels by *New York Times* bestselling author R.A. Salvatore (including an upcoming Drizzt novel trilogy that makes a great jumping on point for new readers), it was fitting for Bob to add some fine touches to this expanding drow lore.

“As part of this worldbuilding we had to show that Drizzt was hardly

unique as an udadrow who isn't evil. I did that in my early books but it really came to the fore in the recent *Generations* trilogy, when we go back in time with Zaknafein and Jarlaxle," Bob explains. "You see an undercurrent in drow society that knows the Matrons' actions are wicked and cruel. Even Dab'nay Tr'arach, who's a priestess of Lolth, hates the Spider Queen and everything that she has to do to survive. But what are they going to do? They can't fight the power. If a priestess stands up and declares that what is happening is wrong, the Handmaidens show up and take her to the abyss for retraining. This is why Drizzt is such an icon for them. Not only did he escape, but Lolth tried to get him back, and failed—twice."



To learn more about Drizzt, visit legendofdrizzt.com

Drizzt's story is one of tragedy. In Jeremy's initial concept pitch for the animated short *Sleep Sound*, the drow ranger has realized the dysfunction of his own home, and more importantly his own family, and has been forced to turn his back on them and venture out into the world to become who he wants to be. The narration was planned as a lilting, spoken lullaby that Menzoberranzan drow use to ease their children to 'sleep', filled with Lolthian drow values such as the comfort of the dark and the safety of community.

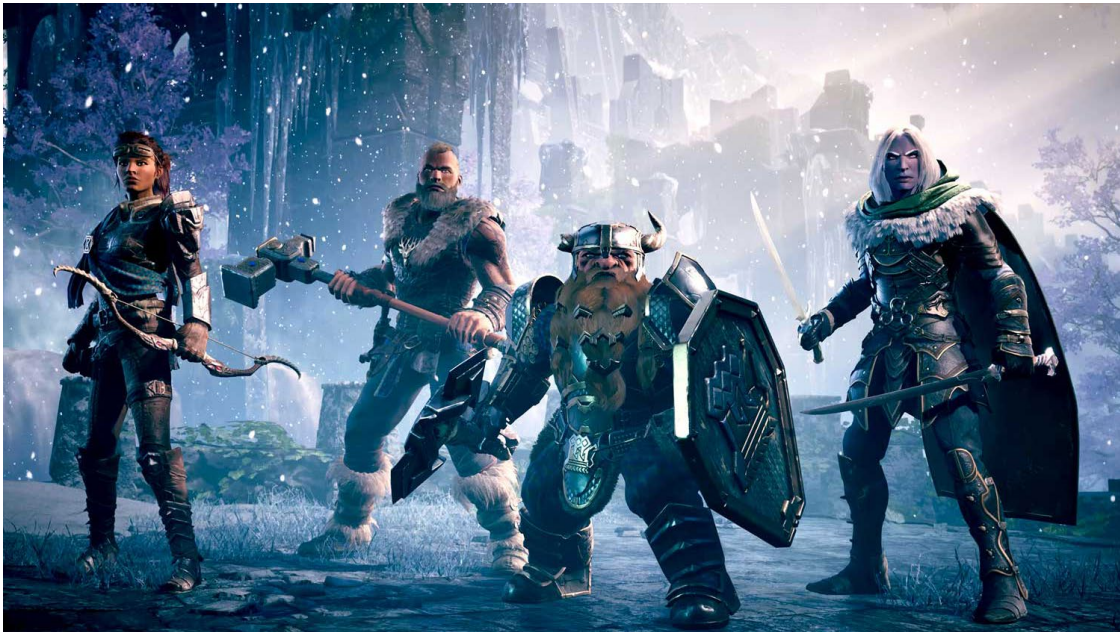
"Initially, the visuals support these statements. As the poem continues, it starts to take on a more ominous character, and we see Drizzt begin to act in ways that diverge from what we're hearing. Ultimately, we realize that this sleepy-time poem is actually a tool for indoctrinating the young second-boys into this dark religion and we

see Drizzt acting in outright rebellion against the false teachings,” Jeremy explains.

“The narration becomes increasingly biting in tone and delivery as if responding to Drizzt’s actions. As the audience takes this short but memorable journey of revelation with Drizzt, we all join him in rejecting the underlying evil we have been hearing.”

You can find more information on Drizzt Do’Urden and the Companions of the Hall at [legendofdrizzt.com](https://www.legendofdrizzt.com). You can also team up to play as Drizzt and the Companions in the action co-op video game *Dark Alliance*, released June 22, 2021. R.A. Salvatore’s latest novel, *Starlight Enclave*, publishes August 19, 2021 and is **available for pre-order now. Visit the dedicated Amazon hub to find novels, action figures, and other expressions of Drizzt and his friends, foes, and adventures.**

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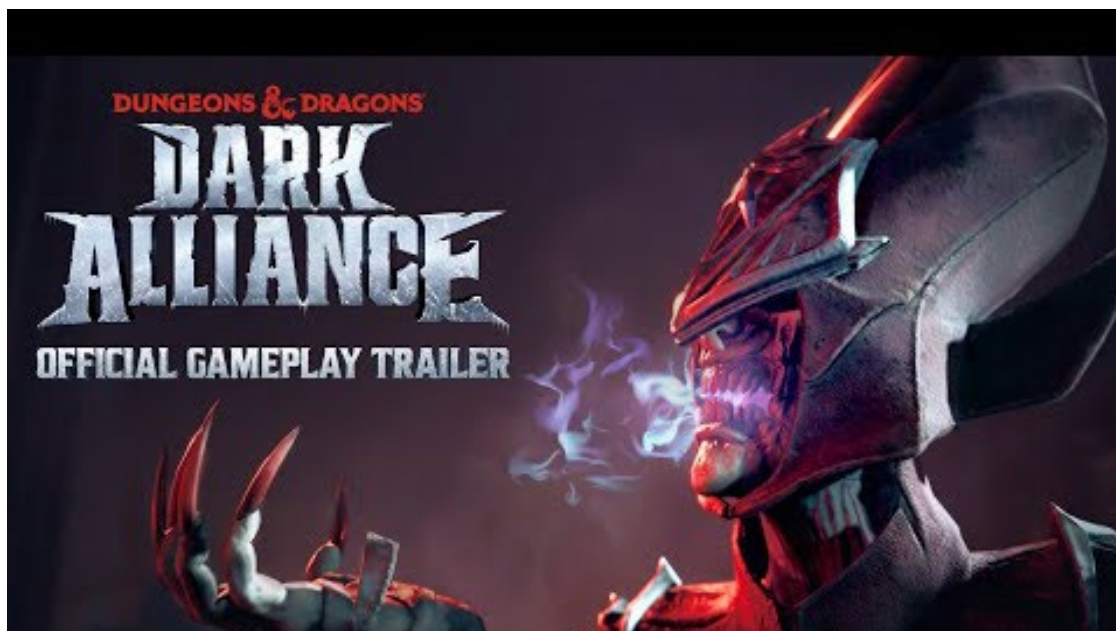
Dark Alliance

The world of Dungeons & Dragons is about to come roaring to life as co-op action video game.

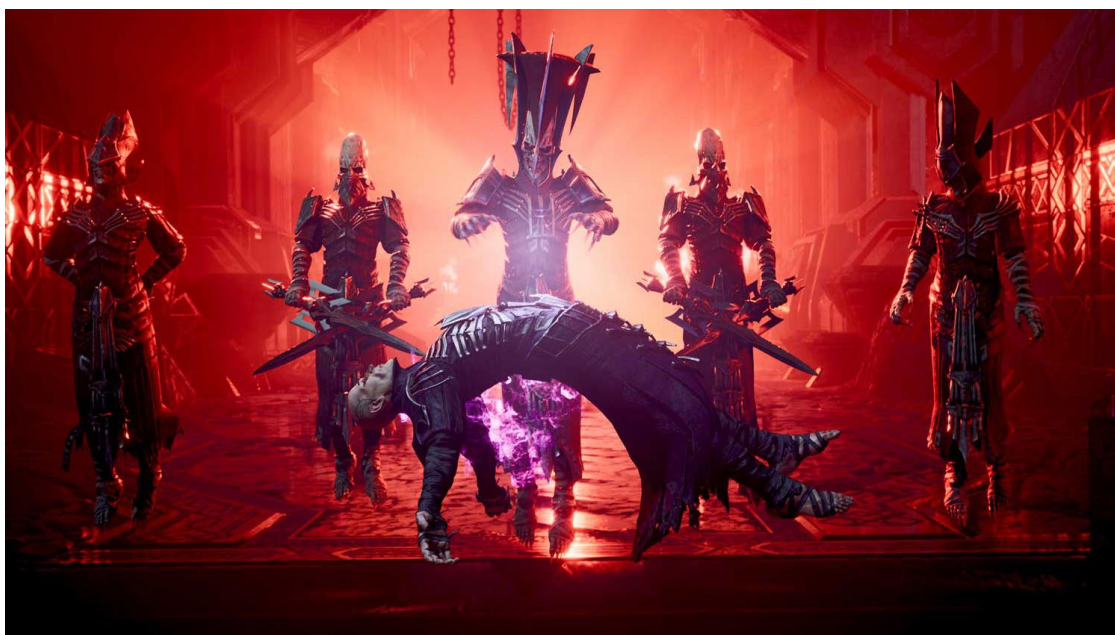
The world of Dungeons & Dragons is about to come roaring to life as new co-op action video game *Dark Alliance* explodes onto consoles and PC on June 22, 2021. It's your party and their funeral as you band together with friends to fight vicious monsters from the D&D universe.

Filled with real-time combat and dynamic co-op play, the game sees powerful frost giants and vengeful dragons roam unchecked through Icewind Dale, as invading armies grow stronger every day. Thankfully, you'll have allies on hand to help you overcome these dire forces.

"I am thrilled to announce that *Dark Alliance* will be available on Xbox One, Xbox Series X|S, Windows 10 PC, and phones and tablets via Xbox Cloud Gaming (Beta) with Xbox Game Pass on Day One, June 22," says Jeff Hattem, Head of Studio and Creative Director at Tuque Games. "The game will also support PC and console cross play at launch!"



Dark Alliance is a third-person action brawler that drops you and your friends into the unforgiving frozen hellscape of Icewind Dale to take on iconic Dungeons & Dragons monsters and collect epic loot. You can venture on your own, but with the addition of cross play on PC and Xbox featuring up to four-player co-op, why would you? Especially as party members will be able to help each other when things get tough.



(select to view)

“Just as in the tabletop version of D&D, you can revive your allies if they fall, and characters are unconscious in *Dark Alliance* until

someone revives them. Although when you activate a checkpoint, characters are automatically revived,” explains Kevin Neibert, Lead Game Designer at Tuque Games.

“If you ever get held by a movement-impairing condition, such as being frozen or grappled, an ally can come over and hit you with an attack to break you free. Their attack doesn’t do any damage, but it will end the condition. A single player can achieve the same by mashing the X button to free themselves, but coordinating with friends can free you a lot faster.



(select to view)

Kevin says the team at Tuque Games took inspiration from the conditions that affect players within the TTRPG version of Dungeons & Dragons. Each of the elements within the game has a certain condition associated with them: frozen for cold, burning for fire, exhausted for lightning, and cursed for necrotic. If a player takes enough damage from a single element, that extra condition applies to them.

“And if you get blinded in the game, a filter overlay is applied to your screen to make it harder to see,” Kevin reveals. “One of the bosses also makes you confused, which inverts your keypad controls. When you press forward, you go backwards, and if you press left, you go right. A lot of people on the development team have accidentally walked off cliffs when they’re confused.”

DEVELOPER INSIGHTS

The team at Tuque games responsible for crafting everything from armored beholders and goblinoids with a culinary passion has taken fans behind their process in a series of developer diaries. These exclusive behind-the-scenes peeks begin with the inception of *Dark Alliance* and show how the heavy metal style of this multi-player video game developed over time.

Episode 1: Tuque's Adventure Begins

“Starting to work on a new project, especially when it’s an IP you’re starting from scratch, could be frightening. In our case we saw it as an amazing challenge,” says Lead Animator Sebastien Dussault, as he discusses the origins of *Dark Alliance*.

“I was always the Dungeon Master. I get fun out of crafting really amazing experiences for players. And we’re not short on ambition at this studio,” says Jeff Hattem. “At that early point the game was a top-down, action RPG that allowed you to gather with your friends and smash monsters.”



Episode 2: Bringing Dungeons & Dragons To Life

“For one year I had been chasing this dream of getting the greenlight to work on a D&D game. When I got that greenlight, it was one of the most awe-inspiring, emotionally charged moments of my life. And then it hit me like a cold shower—oh my God, we’ve got to do

this now,” Jeff reveals.

“We decided to go more towards action RPG and change the camera to the third-person camera,” says Tuque’s Art Director Stefan Leblanc, as Jeff adds, “It was such a huge undertaking and it meant that we had to start over from everything we had done up to that point.”

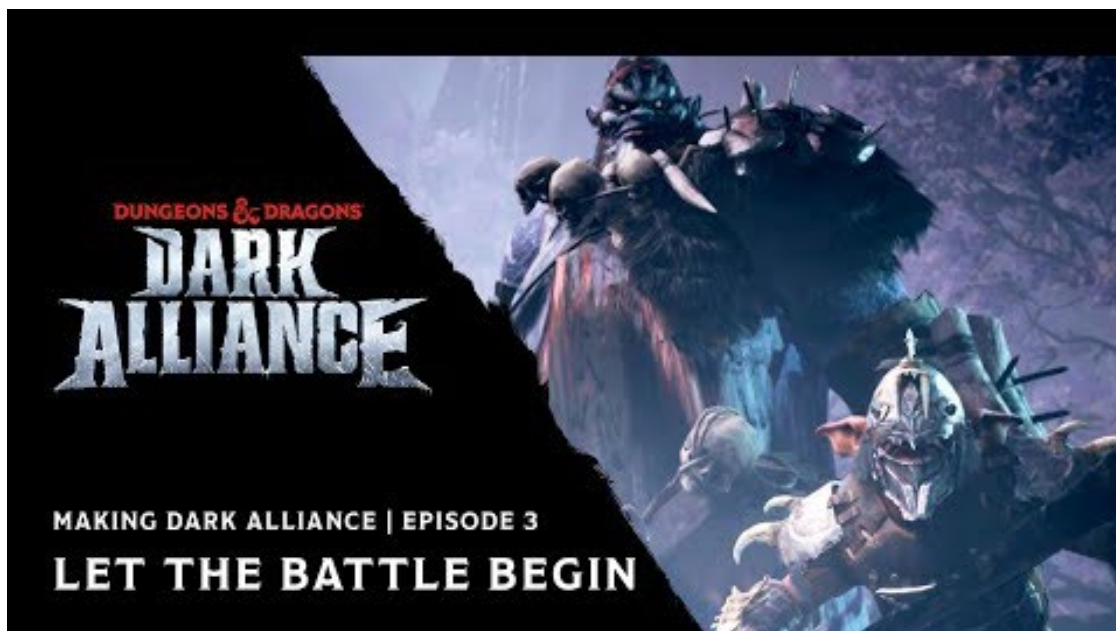


Episode 3: Let the Battle Begin

“We wanted to have story, we wanted to have combat, we wanted to have everything,” says Stefan.

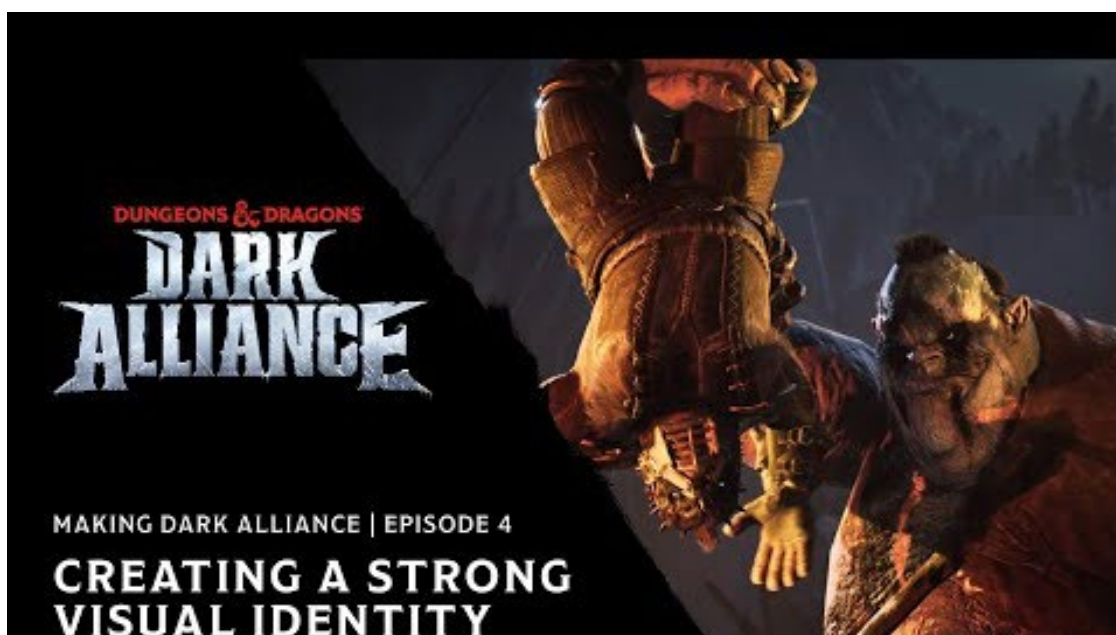
“The challenge was, do we build a more linear, narrative story or do we focus on action and throwing down with monsters?” adds Jeff.

“At a point in production, we looked at what we had and the parts of the game that were really standing out were the combat.”



Episode 4: Art & Monsters

“I was meeting some of the execs at Wizards of the Coast and we had pinned up some artwork. And one of the execs was trying to get me to explain the art direction in two words,” Stefan remembers. “I’m looking at the images on the wall and I say, ‘We’re heavy metal.’”



Until fans can officially join the party themselves, they can watch the team at Tuque Games and special guests play the game live every Friday until launch at 12pm PT on the [official D&D Twitch channel](#) and the [Dark Alliance YouTube channel](#).

Third-person co-op action RPG *Dark Alliance* is coming to PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox ONE, and Xbox Series X on June 22, 2021. It has been rated M for mature and you can learn more at the official [Dark Alliance website](#). You can find more information on Drizzt Do'Urden and the Companions of the Hall at [legendofdrizzt.com](#). R.A. Salvatore's latest Drizzt novel, *Starlight Enclave*, publishes August 19, 2021 and is [available for pre-order now](#).

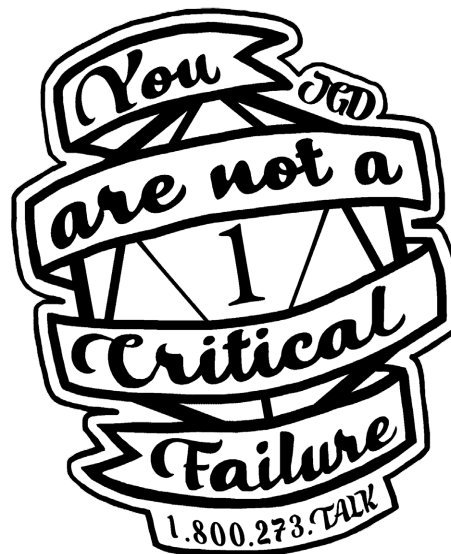
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JASPER'S GAME DAY

As Jasper's Game Day looks ahead to a week of fundraising events, founder Fenway Jones traces the history of the mental health charity.

“**W**hen I first had the idea for Jasper's Game Day in 2018, it was going to be a small, one-time event. Originally, that event wasn't even going to be in person. We were planning an online chat with Satine Phoenix, who was going to talk about Dungeons & Dragons and answer Dungeon Master questions, before we decided to make it a whole day of games,” Fenway Jones, founder of the mental health charity, tells *Dragon+*. “We raised just over \$8,000 at that first event. So many people asked when our next event was being held that we realized how necessary this was for the gaming community and decided to continue what we'd started.”

The non-profit charity was born out of tragedy, when at the age of fourteen Fenway lost two friends to suicide in the space of a couple of months. Jasper's Game Day uses gaming to raise money and awareness about a subject many people find difficult to talk about, with all its proceeds directly impacting suicide prevention across the globe.



“Following the suicides, I didn’t know what I was feeling or how I was supposed to react. Obviously, there was a lot of pain and grief. But I wanted to use what I was experiencing to help others avoid the same kind of heartache and suffering. I chose to focus on the gaming community because one of the friends I lost was a high school student I enjoyed going to conventions and playing games with,” she remembers.

Jasper's pin (select to view)

“It’s been proven that a lot of people don’t like to talk about mental health and will avoid the subject of suicide, unless it has recently affected their life. The aim was to remove some of the stigma that exists around talking about both suicide and suicide prevention. We wanted to create something that would allow people to discuss it more openly, to show them that they’re not alone. And also, to help raise money for vital services.”



RAISING AWARENESS

Jasper’s Game Day transformed into a larger organization following its second event. The team started attending conventions at the invitation of Baldman Games, raising money as part the D&D Adventurers League and through the charity’s wider fundraising presence at the events. In 2020, Jasper’s expanded its online streams, inviting gamers and mental health professionals onto the YouTube show #everyrollmatters to discuss the positive effects role play and gaming can have on mental health. The first episode features Dr.

April Foreman and Jasper's Game Day advisor Shareef Jackson.



It wasn't long before Jasper's Game Day was able to expand on the charity's name to run a major event each year called Jasper's Game Week, running seven days of streams and games that last (almost) 24 hours a day. In 2020, Jasper's Game Week raised over \$50,000 and Fenway hopes to double that when the 2021 event runs from April 30 to May 10.

"It's certainly expanded," says Fenway, who turned eighteen this year, celebrating that milestone with [an online game](#) DMed by Todd Stashwick. "We started Jasper's Game Week following the second Jasper's Game Day and after its first year there were a lot more people involved and it ran a lot longer.

"We began planning this year's Jasper's Game Week back in October because it now takes a lot to be able to pull this off. Almost four years after we first started, we'll host events online in five different countries, played in three different languages, and in forty different US states.

"We'll be running on [D&D Beyond's Twitch channel](#) on April 30 and May 1, followed by five days on [Mini Terrain Domain](#). We'll also be broadcasting during the non-US hours for those five days on [Ardent Roleplay's Twitch channel](#), with the help of Meeples & Dragons from Australia. And we follow that with three days of conventions, one of which is the [D&D Virtual Play Weekend](#) as part

of the Adventurers League.”



RAISING MONEY

While it's important for [Jasper's Game Day](#) to get people talking about suicide, the charity also prides itself on raising funds to help crisis centers and other suicide prevention projects. Aside from regular donations (which can be made [here](#)), the charity's strong association with gaming provides some interesting ways to boost funds.

“D&D fans can win the chance to participate in our celebrity games by bidding on auctioned seats at [Jasper's Game Week](#). We usually work with three celebrity players and three auction seats,” Fenway explains.

“But there are a number of ways people can be a part of our events—whether that's through watching a streamed game or donating as it's happening. During a stream, viewers can help us by buying [Tiltify rewards](#). Those affect the game itself and the most popular Tiltify rewards are advantage, disadvantage, and rerolls for the players, although adding a monster is also pretty popular. And during events, we'll usually hold raffles, giveaways, and possibly even an auction or two.”

Jasper's Game Week

[View Schedule](#)

Jasper's Game Day has also recently released an adventure on the Dungeon Masters Guild, written by the Adventurers League moderators, with profits benefitting the charity. You can buy [*Shadows Under Ice* here](#).

“We try to talk about the subject of mental health as much as possible in everything we do, while still creating fun and entertaining events. That might involve adding elements into our games that touch on that subject, or creating games that are specifically designed around mental health themes,” Fenway says.

“We've written a couple of adventures that are designed around mental health, so D&D does feel well suited to that. It has the unique ability as part of its storytelling to bring in issues and themes that might be difficult to include in other formats.”

You can find more information about Jasper's Game Day at the [official website](#), make a [charitable donation](#) or connect with them on [Discord](#), [Twitter](#), and [Facebook](#). Jasper's Game Week runs from April 30 to May 10, 2021.

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Be Prepared, for Adventure

UK Scouts has partnered on an Entertainer activity badge that adds the roleplaying experience of Dungeons & Dragons.

by John Dodd

When it comes to adventuring, Scouts is like a real-life Dungeons & Dragons experience. It promises action, skills, adventure, expeditions, communing with nature, and even using special items (such as that **neckerchief**, which identifies the troop each Scout is from, can also be used as everything from a bandage or a face mask to an International Semaphore signal flag). And there's now a whole new connection between the UK Scouts and D&D, as the two organizations have partnered on a special Entertainer Activity badge, while providing some great new resources.

The D&D Entertainer Activity badge can be earned in a couple of

different ways: either by organizing and planning an original piece of entertainment; or by taking part in an arranged piece of entertainment to help other Scouts.



Being able to create a story that engages young minds in such an active way is a positive experience. While D&D can't replace all the activities that Scouts do, in some cases it's been possible to give Scouts a virtual taste of being out in the wilds at a time when it hasn't been possible to gather together.

“So many aspects of the badges that the Scouts can achieve, like caving, cooking, crafting, and survival skills, are just as relevant within the game world as they are in ours,” says Lee Quinn of the 2nd Warrington West Scouts, who likened the experience of playing D&D to that of telling stories around the campfire. “Using Dungeons & Dragons to gamify those activities, we could turn a normal camp into a full adventure.”



(select to view)

Ralph Taylor, whose son Illian Taylor Mendizabal is a young Patrol Leader with 1st/4th Addlestone Scouts, had always impressed the problem solving and strategy elements of games such as chess on his son. And he likes that D&D offers guidelines on how to run a game, rather than hard rules on how adventuring must be carried out. He viewed the world within the game as being very much like the world outside it, in that things can change at a moment's notice.

“It's possible to simulate and practice real life skills within the game environment. Being able to read a map is just as useful a skill in the Forgotten Realms as it is with an Ordnance Survey map in the real world,” Ralph says.

Illian, who takes the role of Dungeon Master for his troop, echoed the sentiment that players must remember the official Scouts motto and always *be prepared*. “As a DM, I like to set challenges and see how other people solve them. Being able to help the players when they get stuck on things is a satisfying experience,” he adds.



BUILDING CONFIDENCE

UK Scouts already excels at running community events that bring people together. One of the benefits of the new D&D Entertainer Activity badge is the chance for players to interact with other adventurers. Having them work their way through situations that they've never been in before can help boost social skills. D&D

promotes the core values of friendship and inclusivity, and by working together in the game, new players can also learn how to work together when they're doing other activities.

“It's easy to bond with others when you have a shared purpose. Adventuring provides that purpose even in times when it's not possible to see each other in person,” says Dan Pearce, an observer who acts as Dungeon Master at the 1st Bramshill Rotherwick Scouts in Hampshire. Dan, a keen outdoorsman who has built a Saxon house in his back garden over the lockdown period, has seen interest in Dungeons & Dragons grow within his troop as players have engaged with it. He's even used the flexibility of the tabletop roleplaying game to tailor the experience for certain players and make it more personal.

“One of my groups has a player who was more into football than gaming but came along for a session. With a slight amendment to the rules, his mage fired footballs at the opponents rather than fireballs, and he went from being slightly interested to fully engaged in seconds.”



(select to view)

Kat Donohue, Assistant Scout Leader at the 1st Withington and 89th Manchester Scouts (who also works at the gaming store Fanboy Three in Manchester), remembers the personal development that came courtesy of her own gaming experiences. Kat says living a life

of bold adventure lets players stretch their social skills in a safe environment where there are no limits, using D&D as the perfect tool to build conversation skills. “My life changed when I first started gaming and I became much more confident and assertive. After all, if I could find a way to deal with things in a different world, I could do it in this one too.”

“Most of those who play become bolder and more confident in what they’re doing. And the confidence they find when playing doesn’t go away when the game ends,” adds Kevin Gough, Cub Scout Leader of 7th Newport in South Wales.

SCOUT MEETINGS

After a year of being locked down as a result of the pandemic, all of the Scout groups *Dragon+* spoke with are looking forward to resuming their wide range of in-person activities. That brings with it the added bonus of being able to play games with others around a table, as members try to earn their D&D Entertainer Activity badge. Kat expects the take up of Dungeons & Dragons to go from strength to strength when the lockdown finally eases: “It’s very easy to get into character when you’re playing in person, as you can see everyone else around the table doing the same thing.”



(select to view)

Dan also feels it’s easier for potential players to see the enjoyment everyone else is having to when you demonstrate the game in person. “As with many of the practical Scout activities, it’s made more real if you’re doing it with your own hands. There’s a tactile joy in being able to pick up dice and roll them,” he adds.

At its heart, this partnership hopes to bring an increased sense of adventure to members of the UK Scouts, as they face new challenges

in both this world and the fantasy landscapes of Dungeons & Dragons.

You can find more information about the partnership between the UK Scouts and D&D at the [official website](#), and order a free copy of the *Dungeons & Dragons Starter Set* for your UK Scout troop [here](#).



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FACE YOUR FEARS

EXPLORE THE HORRORS OF RAVENLOFT



DISCOVER MORE AT
DungeonsandDragons.com



Community Poll: Candlekeep Books

Revealing the most entertaining new tomes suggested by D&D players in honor of Candlekeep Mysteries.

Candlekeep Mysteries did more than hand Dungeons & Dragons players a host of amazing new conundrums to solve. It also created seventeen unusual and interesting books that could happily grace the shelves at Faerûn’s most famous library.

Even knowing that such unique works exist might benefit parties keen to scan the library’s shelves, as it’s impossible to gain access to Candlekeep’s knowledge without handing over something similarly rare (and the following might serve as books they bring).

“The required entrance fee for admission into Candlekeep is a work of writing not already collected therein. Those who show up at the gates without such a gift are kindly but firmly turned away,” explains

the opening chapter of *Candlekeep Mysteries*.

In homage to those seventeen mysteries, we asked you to tell us what other unique tomes might exist in the Forgotten Realms. And you didn't disappoint—the entries below should liven up any game! Our sincere thanks to all the contributors and we look forward to your creativity in our next community poll.

Artist: Mark Mitchell

If It Looks Evil, Sounds Evil, And Smells Evil, It Probably Is!



(Select to view)

A pop-up book for kids.

Sandie H.

Freefalling: Poems Inspired by Feather Fall Experiences

Mira M.

Summoning Circles and You: What You NEED to Know Before Drawing Your First Sigil



(Select to view)

A hefty tome that includes:

- Instructions on how to draw a perfect circle.
- Explanation of how symbols interact with each other when they're in different positions within the circle.
- Font choices: the typeface you draw has serious meaning!

- How positioning your circle to the north, south, east, or west affects your summoning ritual.
- And so much more!

John D.

Tome of Foretelling

This book is seemly endless in page count. The pages narrate everything that will happen to the book in the next five to ten seconds, filling with words in real time. One small catch is that the book has a nasty habit of assuming the worst possible scenario, fabricating stories or generally being unhelpful to those who hold it.

Jane D.

ÆBÇs of Dæmönþlægy

A typesetter's nightmare!

Tyler M.

Leomund's Guide to Tiny Hut Holidays



(Select to view)

The holiday home business is a lucrative one and Leomund is capitalizing on his branding. He's just annoyed he didn't realize how much plumbing maintenance he'd have to consider once holidaymakers arrived...

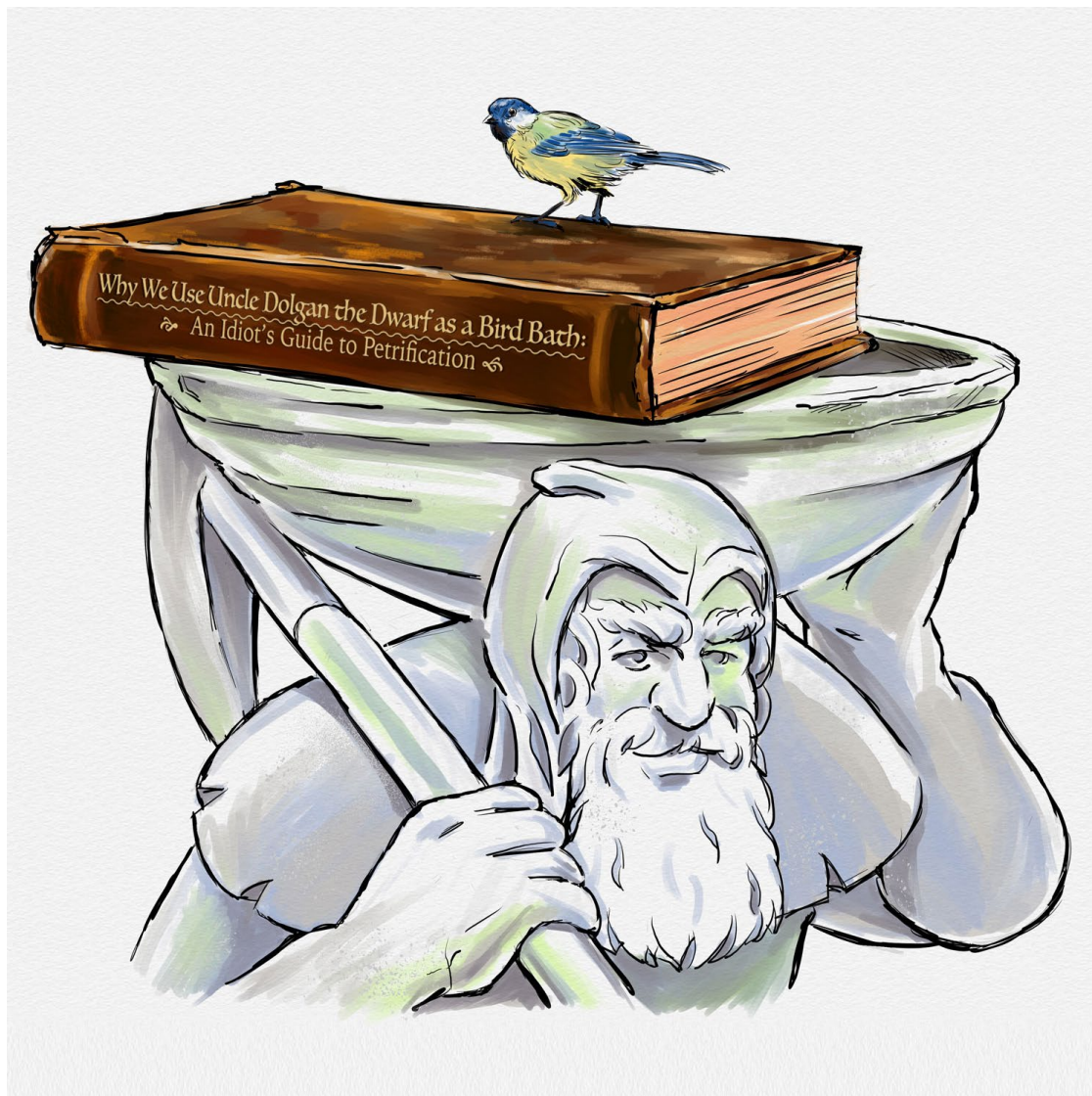
Mira M.

Recognizing Dangerous Honks by Mishevius Gohse

A tome well-worn from many uses and torn on the back cover with little edges nipped off. This book explains to any adventurer what particular breed of terror will be coming for them in a dungeon or quiet village. Complete with various honks, descriptions, and monster details, this A-Z of danger will help any untitled adventurer on their path to glory.

Sam K.

Why We Use Uncle Dolgan the Dwarf as a Bird Bath: An Idiot's Guide to Petrification



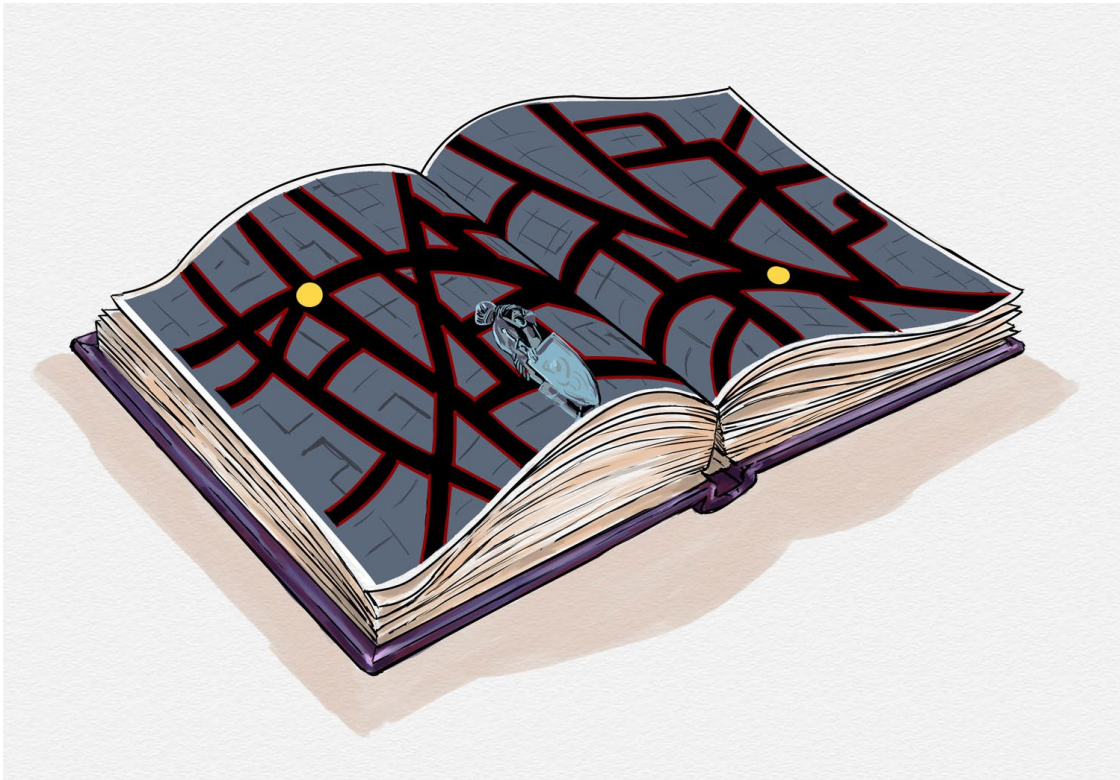
(Select to view)

Sandie H.

How to Collect Gnomes

Calum H.

An A to Z of Waterdeep



(Select to view)

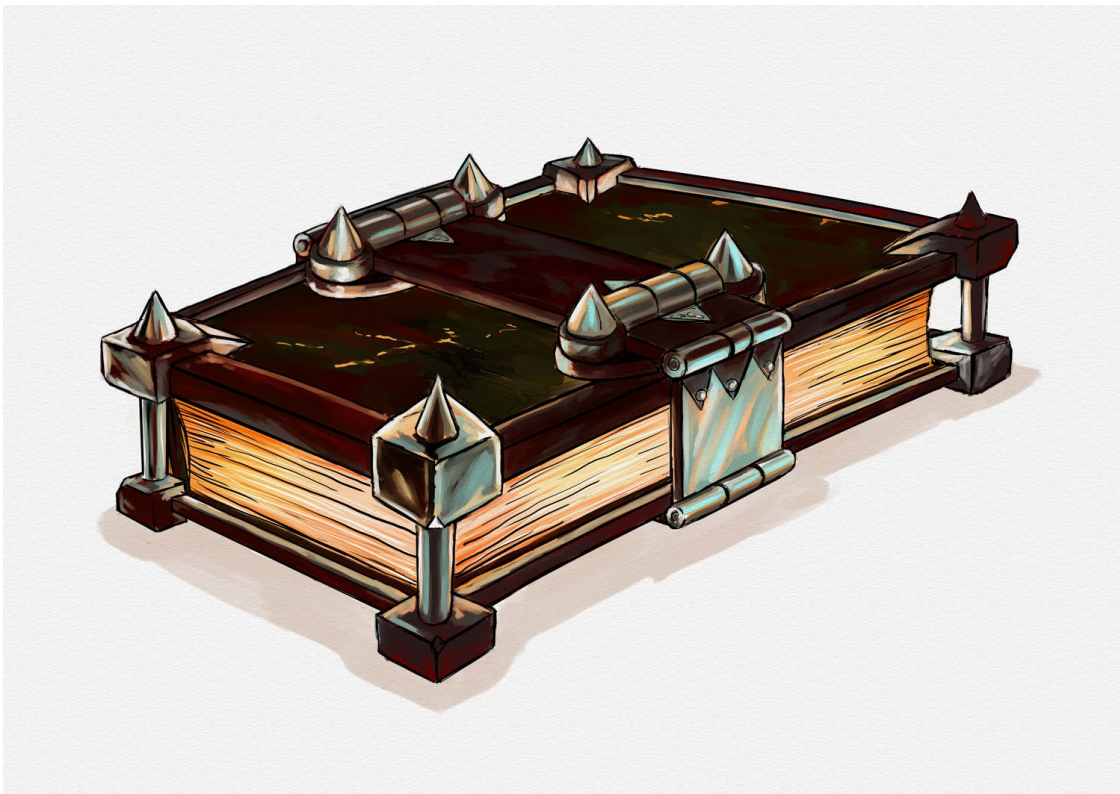
This tome magically updates itself if opened within the city limits of Waterdeep to show the most current layout of its buildings and streets. What is only obvious to someone who casts *identify* on the book is that it can also be used to show the location of any Masked Lord not specifically protected against scrying. No identifying information is included, just the location of each Masked Lord as a dot on the map. The Open Lord of Waterdeep is not tracked in this way.

Paul K.

So You Raised a Zombie: A First-Timer's Guide to the World of Necromancy

John D.

Hells or Bust! The Quickest Route to Avernus



(Select to view)

The spine, corner pieces and clasps of this devilish adventure story are fashioned from infernal iron and traced with veins of hellfire that shed dim light in a 5-foot-radius. When a creature finishes reading any chapter in this book, they must make a DC12 Constitution save. On a failed save, they die, and their soul is funneled into the River Styx, where it's reborn instantly as a lemure devil.

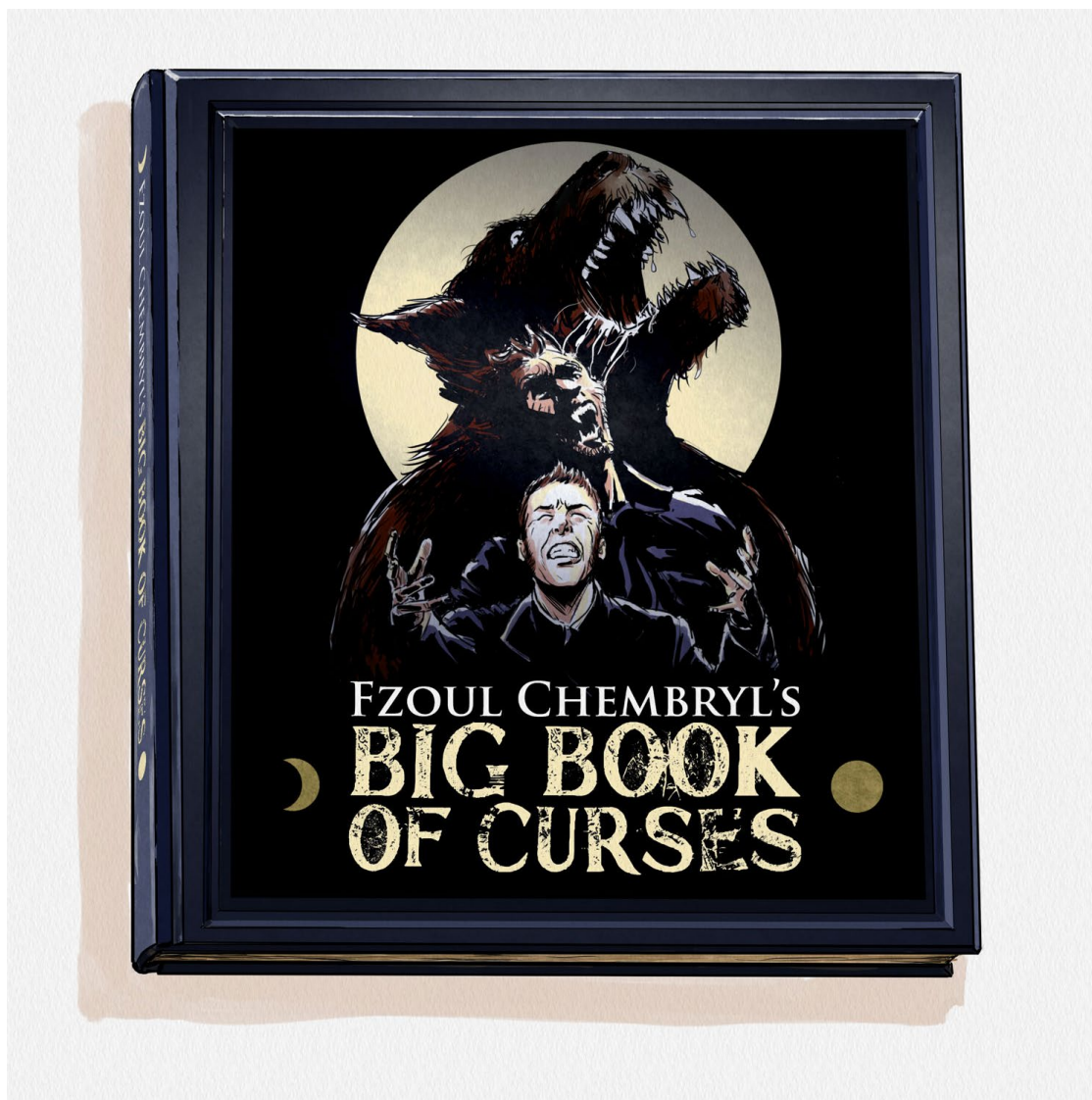
Maxi C.

Go the Fey to Sleep!

Faerûn's answer to the fun (if slightly swearsy) infant bedtime story *Go The F**k To Sleep*. This guide to rocking the tots off to snoozy land is aimed at elven parents who can't cast sleep on their resistant offspring.

Emma H.

Fzoul Chembryl's Big Book of Curses



(Select to view)

If someone affected by a curse reads this book, and their specific curse is not already described within it, they must make a DC 18 Wisdom save. On a failed save, the curse is removed from them and is sucked into the book, where it gains its own entry page. If the curse was attached to an item, the item itself disappears and a page describing it appears within the book. The book can absorb one curse/cursed item per day. However, if someone reads this book and they are not cursed, they must pass a DC 18 Wisdom save or be affected by a random curse/cursed item. If the item is one that must be attuned to, the reader immediately becomes attuned to it. If their attunement slots are already full, they randomly lose attunement with one existing magic item. The book attempts to curse a reader until it succeeds, should someone be fascinated (or stupid) enough to keep reading.

Matt C.

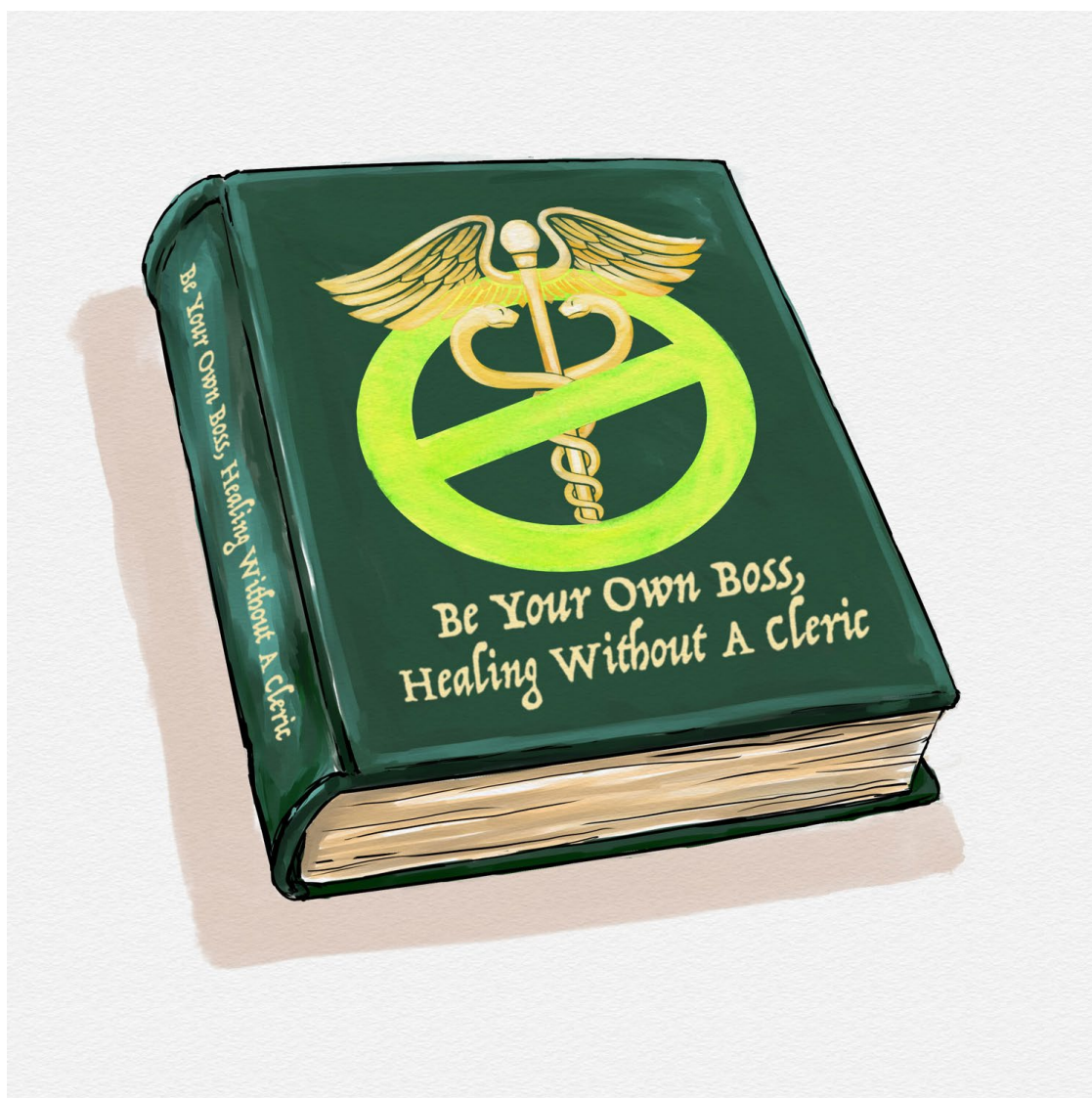
Ode to Kill: A Brief Collection of Orc Poetry

Calum H.

The Top 10 Places In Faerûn To Eat Or Be Eaten At

Jim W.

Be Your Own Boss, Healing Without a Cleric



(Select to view)

Sandie H.

Candlekeep Mysteries is available now at your **local game store**, bookstores such as **Barnes & Noble**, **Books-a-Million**, or online at retailers such as **Amazon**. A digital version is also available at **D&D Beyond**, **Fantasy Grounds**, and **Roll20**.

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D&D Classics

It's not all dark and dreary even when traversing the most dangerous of dungeons!

by Bart Carroll

WHY SO SERIOUS?!?

I'll admit that as a young gamer I was never quite sure what to think about the humor-themed content in my *Dragon* magazines. For a game that makes room for everything from the vampiric Strahd von Zarovich, to *Barrier Peaks*' laser guns, to kaiju-like tarrasque, somehow it was the inclusion of humor that rankled my sensibilities. This was a *serious* game, that I took *seriously*, so shouldn't everything in it be *serious* as well!?

As everyone knows from actually playing, humor's always been as much a part of the game experience as, well, dungeons, dragons, and everything else. It's the jokes around the table, the Rube Goldberg-esque schemes, the goofball NPCs with their nonsensical names and accents, that add to the fun as much as the dramatic confrontations and epic battles. The game itself has embraced this aspect, whether with comic panels appearing in the first edition core rulebooks, the

early adventure module that included a bizarre portal to the moon, or the *Book of Wondrous Inventions* and its in-game version of vending machines. There's the dread gazebo, the head of Vecna, Meepo, and every **PAX live game** ever run. The list goes on...

Not all jokes land with everyone, and in-jokes don't always travel from table to table. But in the spirit of good-natured humor as part of the D&D experience, we offer this issue's cover as part of that tradition—which seems timely, for April.

And having created our own fun cover, we wanted to take a quick look back at similar covers celebrating the game's more humorous side:

Dragon #32 (December 1979)



From the issue's welcome: "As this month's cover by Phil Foglio illustrates, if you asked Santa for those super life-like miniatures, you might be advised to use a little caution when you open the box."

ECOLOGY OF...

When it's time to roll for initiative, even the game's goofier creatures can threaten damage and death. While the first edition *Monster Manuals* provided scant few details on monster ecologies (stating that the owlbear is *probably* the result of genetic experimentation and leaving it at that, for example), *Dragon* magazine's *Ecology Of...* articles expanded on them more fully—even for the odder entries.

While these creatures have evolved over time, here are some of the earlier entries from the game's unique bestiary:

Mimic (*Dragon* #96): Ed Greenwood penned this *Ecology Of...* (as he did a great many others), using the framing device of Maerlun the Scholar's journal to add details on this dangerous dungeon dweller—a format that would be greatly expanded in the coming years!

[DOWNLOAD](#)

Gelatinous Cube (*Dragon* #124): The framing device employed here comes as a tale told by the adventurer Haptooth at the Feast of the Moon. Haptooth relates his encounter with a gelatinous cube, while the endnotes provide in-game mechanics.

[DOWNLOAD](#)

Owlbear (*Dragon* #214): Johnathan M. Richards details everyone's favorite half-ursine, half-strigine. In similar format employed by Ed Greenwood, we start with an in-world encounter followed by in-game endnotes—including options for winged and **arctic owlbear** varieties.

[DOWNLOAD](#)

Flump (*Dragon* #246): How could we not include these beloved critters, as presented to the local chapter of the Monster Hunters Association?

[DOWNLOAD](#)

FINAL THANKS

Our thanks to everyone who's ever cracked wise around the table—so, pretty much everyone then! And on behalf of DMs, for all those who have done so without utterly derailing the game!

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Monthly adventure role-playing aid

Dragon[®]

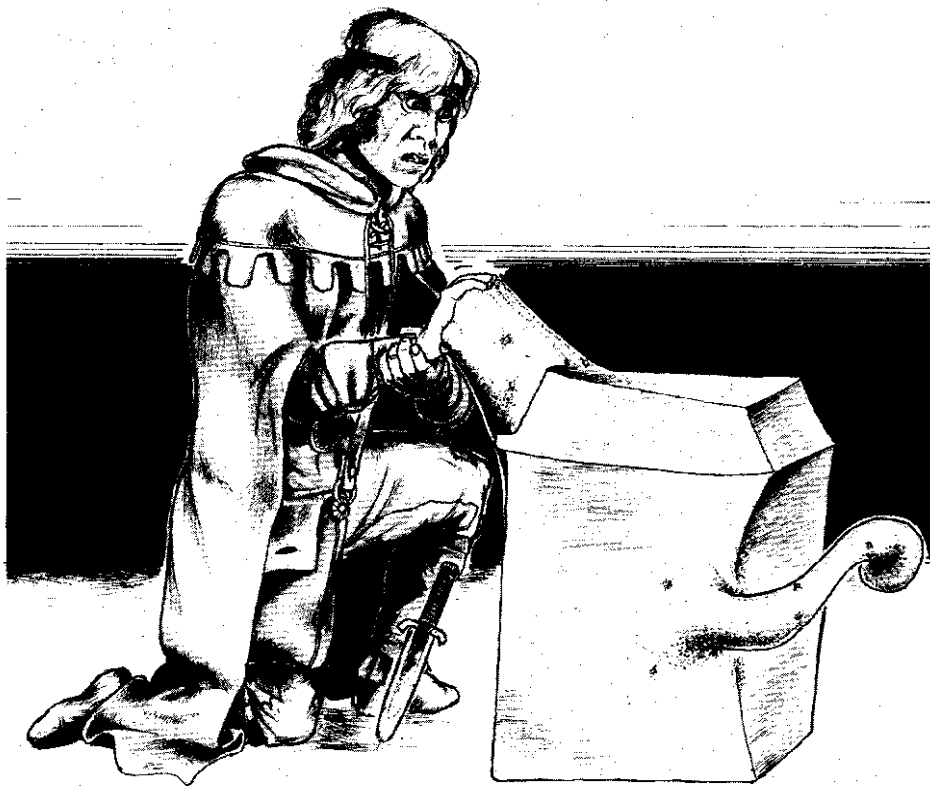
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#96

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194-719-5-5/SR0000





The ecology of the mimic

by Ed Greenwood

From the *Journals* of Maerlun the Scholar:

The mimic is a curious (and dangerous) creature to most minds — but few know, or care to know, that there are actually several related species of mimic, divided into two groups: a larger, “killer” variety that is of lesser intelligence, attacking all nearby prey, and does not speak; and the more intelligent, eloquent species which will often bargain for food, has a curious (as yet unfathomed by me) language of its own, and often speaks orcish, the common tongue, dwarvish, or other tongues used in the vicinity of the individual creature’s hunting ground.

The mimic gains its name from its ability to alter not only its body shape but the color and texture of the outer surface as well. The color and texture changes are accomplished by the shifting of pigmented liquid between interior and exterior body cells, so that the creature resembles wood or stone in color and texture depending on whether this pigmented liquid is brought to the outer surface of the creature’s body or stored internally.

A mimic is naturally gray in hue, with a smooth, very hard outer skin that gives it the stone-like appearance. The pigmented liquid, brownish in color (often revealed to adventurers when a mimic is wounded in battle), is held within the body in large, muscular organs that serve as both bags and pumps. When these organs are squeezed by the contraction of

the cavity wall muscles, they squirt their contents rapidly (within 1 round) into the outer skin layer, filling many capillaries that lie just beneath the skin surface. These capillaries then stand out, brownish and wrinkled, in a pattern resembling wood grain.

Reversing the process, from the wood-grain appearance to the natural state, requires a sort of external contortion; a mimic appears to wriggle and twist all over as it empties its capillaries of the liquid. (The creature can, as we all know, alter the external configuration of its form at will, within the limits imposed by the actual volume of its form.) The mimic grows replacement layers of skin beneath the outer one, which is constantly being worn away by the ravages of movement, battle, and feeding.

The mimic is amorphous, and moves in the same way it attacks: by extending strong pseudopods, which exude a sticky “glue,” and pulling themselves along. A mimic can “unstick” its own glue at any time, and it never sticks to itself.

Reputedly, this glue is sticky enough that only the strongest of adventurers has a good chance of breaking the mimic’s hold without killing the creature first. Some adventurers claim to have pulled themselves free from a mimic’s glue, but such tales are rare and often their veracity is doubtful: (To simulate the possibility of breaking free in game terms, held characters may be allowed to attempt an

“open doors” roll based on their strength. Repeated attempts to break free may be made, but no other action — attack or defense — is possible by the victim during the round of attempted escape.)

Mimics are interested only in personal safety and an endless quest for food. “Killer” mimics will attack any living creature, regardless of the number of adversaries or their powers. The more intelligent variety often prefers to bargain with an enemy initially — but the creatures have no moral standards as we know them: If an enemy is sufficiently weakened after a bargain has been struck, a mimic will “change its mind,” always seeking a meal first and foremost.

Mimics have very sensitive “eyespot” (patches of pigment that are sensitive to heat; light, and vibration) all over their skin. Bright sunlight overwhelms these sensory spots, effectively blinding the mimic; thus, the creatures are almost always found below ground or in other areas where the sun never reaches. Mimics of all sorts are immune to the deleterious effects of alcohol (but will absorb it if offered, to make use of the inherent nutrients and sugar), and are also unaffected by slime (including green slime), molds (including the brown and yellow varieties), and the corrosive secretions of creatures such as the black pudding, gray ooze, ochre jelly, stunjelly, and gelatinous cube.

It should be remembered that mimics can travel on walls and ceilings as easily as they can on floors. Those of the more intelligent sort are most adept at “hiding” by assuming the shape of a partition wall, overhanging arch, or rough rock wall if they feel threatened. One famous, if somewhat extreme, example: A mimic somehow came into one of the busiest market squares of Waterdeep and assumed the shape of a statue. It remained undetected for two winters, until the chronic disappearance of street derelicts in the square on every dark night prompted an investigation. A sewer beside this strangely unfamiliar (to the sculptor who had “done” the square) statue was discovered to be filled to a depth of more than 60 feet with human and animal bones. (Even after this fact was discovered, the “statue” ate two members of the City Watch who prodded it carelessly with their spears, not expecting to find anything.)

Although the details of the concoction are not known by this scribe, it is generally said that the skin of the mimic is useful in the making of a *polymorph (self)* potion. Also, further investigation is needed to determine the range of travel of an individual mimic over a lifetime, and the precise efficacy of the creature’s detection organs, which, based on casual observation, appear to “see” up to 90 feet in subterranean (not total) darkness, and up to 30 feet in the gloom of night, or in darkened areas above ground.

Monthly adventure role-playing aid

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#124

**Aerial adventures
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The Ecology of the Gelatinous Cube

by Ed Greenwood

The adventurer Haptooth had spent many years exploring the vast, labyrinthine, subterranean ways of Undermountain, Waterdeep. Many and strange were the tales he shared over sour brintmash wine at The Sign of the Staff or before the Council of Mages upon the Feast of the Moon, at winter's onset.

At the last Feast, Phantas, a member of that Council, pointedly challenged Haptooth to do more than entertain by speaking of curious observations and dramatic events. Rather, he demanded that Haptooth inform that prestigious group by employing the adventurer's access to the unusual to increase the common knowledge of what is not common at all (as Phantas so eloquently put it). None could fail to note the sharp edge of the verbal dagger he thrust at his peer, though it was but one of a thousand such attacks he had made on Haptooth over the years.

For his part, Haptooth seemed chastened

*Unseeing,
unthinking,
unstoppable*



by the words of his rival and, indeed, came to the next yearly Feast with words of note, for he spoke of inquiries into the nature of that curious creature, the athcoid — more commonly known as the gelatinous cube.

Controversy over the athcoid has long raged among the wise — quite heatedly so in the corridors of the Hall of Beast-Tamers and in the offices of the Imperial Zoo of Amn, the keepers of which have managed to keep a cube alive in captivity for some 12 winters. Over and over, the questions are asked: How intelligent are the cubes? How amorphous are their forms? Of what is their digestive fluid composed, and can it be used as a weapon or in alchemy (or, for that matter, in medicine or in the handling of beasts)? How do athcoids mate — indeed, *do* athcoids mate? Haptooth provided all at the Council of Mages with answers.

"Even now," he said, "in the lightless ways beneath us, these great creatures glide noiselessly along, devoid of malicious intent — indeed, devoid of an conscious-

ness at all — but fully a menace to all who encounter them. Even children know that these nearly transparent, gelatinous monsters cannot digest metal or stone, but feed on plants and beasts of all sorts by paralyzing those encountered, engulfing them, and absorbing nutrients from such prey by means of corrosive digestive fluids.

"Athcoids have no thoughts as we know them, but rather respond automatically — and identically, in all cases — to certain stimuli. They cease to advance when they encounter a cold surface or object, then probe forward to seek a way past or around it. Athcoids are attracted to vibrations or warmth, but seem devoid of hearing. When flowing over or around objects, they seem quite fluid and mutable, but return always to a rectangular or rhomboidal form when their surroundings permit.

"An athcoid does not appear to communicate with any creature, nor can it be controlled, save by use of the stimuli I have already mentioned. When two athcoids meet — and this I saw happen — they merge to become one, of greater size and of an apparently stable nature. This monstrous combination has twice the innate hardness of either of its component creatures, though it eventually divides into two normal athcoids, each exactly like the original component creatures, which go their separate ways.

"More I can tell, gained from the darkest researches. Sadly, athcoids are ignorant of sex." Mutterings and chuckles from the Council followed the comment. "Rather, they reproduce by growing to sufficient size, then split into two slightly smaller creatures. These creatures then grow to a stage which passes for adulthood within a short time.

"As you all must know, athcoids anesthetize prey by means of a gummy secretion which is absorbed into the bloodstream of the prey through its skin. An oral antidote is now available to counteract this effect." Haptooth held up a metal flask, then returned it to its place beside another such flask on the lectern before him. "This antidote is of my own devise. It's expensive, but then so are the consequences if you lack it."

Haptooth paused, appearing to reflect upon some matter. "As to their digestive fluids — these are produced and held in movable, elastic cavities or bubbles within an athcoid's body. When prey is engulfed by a cube, one or more of these mobile bubbles are shifted into contact with the prey. Such fluid has no effect on metal of any sort, and, as we have all heard, metal objects are held for a time within the creature, then expelled through its skin; but the fluid has devastating effects on flesh and cellulose."

So saying, Haptooth undid his sash and pulled his robe open. The crowd mumbled grunts and oaths of amazement. Haptooth's ribs were laid bare in an ivory lattice on one flank. All about this gaping

hole, his flesh was gnarled and twisted like half-melted wax.

"I recently fought my way through a cube, when trapped in a dead-end passage, and this was the result," he said simply. He continued to hold his robe open, turning slowly to allow all in the Hall to see his injury. Then, dropping his arms, he went back to his lectern and took up the two flasks, pocketing the antidote. As he undid the cap on the other, he slowly walked toward the audience, in the direction of Phantas. "Dearly, I paid for my labors, but they were well rewarded. I captured a sample of the digestive fluid," he said in a loud voice, whereupon he drenched the astonished councillor with its contents. "Now, the eminent alchemist Phantas can in his turn increase the common knowledge of what is not common at all."

He left then, *teleporting* with a last fiendish grin, as Phantas's scream echoed loudly through the hall.

Notes

1. Gelatinous cubes may flow through openings as small as 1' across. They sense all living, moving beings within 120' from the vibrations and heat given off by such creatures, and actively pursue such prey.

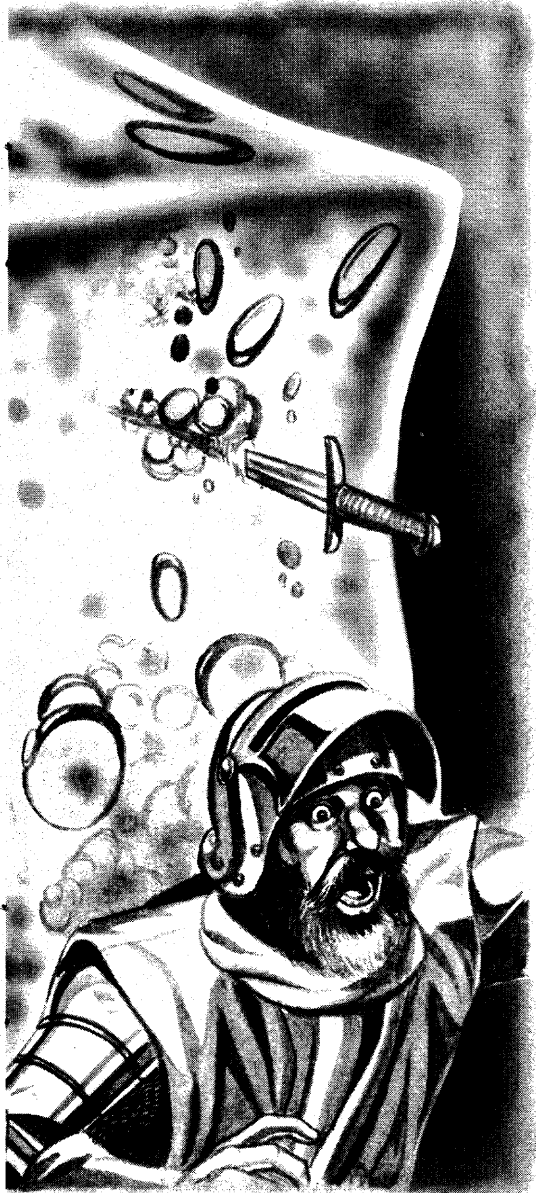
2. Being so totally mindless, a gelatinous cube should be immune to all will-force and mind-affecting magical powers — particularly enchantment/charm spells and mind-reading talents. Charm *monster* thus has no effect upon them.

3. When two cubes meet and merge, the resulting "double cube" attacks as an 8-HD monster with a total number of hit points equal to the total of the two merged cubes. This combination creature retains a size of 10' x 10' x 20', the longest axis being pointed in its direction of travel like a thick-bodied (but square) worm. Otherwise, it is like a normal cube in all respects. Division occurs either immediately upon contact with a third cube or after a period of 2-8 days. Normal-sized cubes divide after a period of six years. Each of the two resulting cubes has 3 HD, half the number of hit points the "parent" cube originally had, and a size of slightly under 8' x 8' x 8'. These "little" cubes grow to maturity in three months. Technically speaking, the gelatinous cube is an immortal organism, since (unless destroyed by adventurers, starvation, or disaster) a cube never dies.

4. Cubes may move about underwater with ease, though the contact poison which paralyzes opponents is much diluted. Saving throws against this effect are made at +6 in this environment.

5. If Haptooth's antidote against a cube's *paralysis* is made available, it removes the *paralysis* within 1-4 rounds after being swallowed (an automatic reflex not stopped by the paralysis). However, the potion has no effect on any other form of *paralysis*, such as that from ghouls or carrion crawlers. The antidote is not magical in nature.

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[Handwritten signature]
1995

THE ECOLOGY OF THE OWLBEAR

**Part bird, part bear,
altogether deadly**

by Johnathan M. Richards

Artwork by Scott Rosema

The two men traipsed through the forest, a study in contrasts. The older man, Griff, had the weather-worn skin of a man who had spent his life exposed to the elements. Gray was starting to show at his temples, yet he strode forward with a confident air, barely feeling the weight of the heavy crossbow he carried over his shoulder or the sword belted at his hip. Colin, on the other hand, was a young lad, cursed with a baby face and insatiable curiosity. He struggled to keep up the pace set by Griff, weighted down by the large pack on his back, nearly tripping over the walking stick he carried with every step.

They were nearing their prey, an owlbear that had taken up residence in the Spinewood Forest and had taken to attacking travelers on the King's Road.

"We're getting near," Griff said. "Take a look at that."

Colin looked at what the older man was indicating, a tree whose bark had literally been shredded in parallel grooves, vertically.¹ He stood staring at it for a while, marveling at the strength of a creature able to dig an inch into a tree with one swipe of its paw, then hurried to catch up to Griff, who had started off again.

After a few minutes' travel, Griff stopped, pointing ahead. "There," he said in a whisper. A cave was visible in the clearing ahead,, its dark interior cloaked in

shadows and mystery. "Quietly now, unpack the gear."

Colin set down his walking stick, lowering his pack to the ground. Opening it, he pulled out a large earthenware jar of honey. Prying off the sealed lid with his knife, he left it in the middle of the clearing, not 20' from the mouth of the cave. Then he backed his way to where Griff stood, at the base of a huge oak, his eyes never leaving the cave for fear that if he did, he would be taken unawares by the beast that dwelled inside.

"Hold this," commanded Griff, passing Colin his crossbow. Dutifully, Colin held the weapon, impressed by its weight. Someday, he thought, I'll wield a weapon like this, and be a fighter like Griff. He often entertained such thoughts, but deep down, doubted that they would ever be more than dreams. His gawky, spindly frame seemed more suited to the life of a sage or wizard, and his insatiable hunger for reading had given him the nickname "Bookhead."

Suddenly realizing he had been day-dreaming again, Colin snapped out of it to see Griff on a branch above him, reaching down for his weapon. Colin passed it up. "Leave the stick, and climb on up here," the older man whispered. Colin leaned his walking stick on the far side of the oak, and clambered up next to his mentor.

"How much time do we have?"

"Better part of an hour, I'd say. Owlbears like to sleep 'til noon or thereabouts. Part of their mixed-up heritage."

"Why don't we just go in there, then? Kill it while it sleeps?"

Griff just chuckled. "Kid, you want to live as long as me, you gotta learn not to take chances. Up here, we're safe. Owlbear can't reach us, but this," hefting the crossbow, "this lets us reach him."²

"And we're using honey as bait? I thought owlbears were strictly carnivorous. Their heads are all owl, according to the illustrations I've seen."

"Yeah, and their bottoms are all bear, but they still lay eggs. Just trust me on this, there's enough bear in an owlbear that it can't pass up honey."³

The two were silent for a while, as Griff readied his crossbow for firing. He had a perfect vantage of the honey jar from his perch in the oak, and yet was reasonably sure that he wouldn't be noticed by the owlbear, even taking its superior senses into account.⁴

The minutes passed, and neither resumed their whispered conversation, not wanting to take the chance of being overheard by a creature that could hear a mouse rustle in the grass across a field.

And finally, their patience was rewarded.

The creature shuffled out of the cave,

reared up on its hind legs, and stretched. Colin was overcome with awe at the massive beast. Seeing it in person was so much greater than studying the inked sketches that were available in the Scribe's Library. The creature stood a full 8' tall, the brown feathers of its owlish head merging seamlessly into the fur of its body, somewhere past its shoulders and back. The owlbear looked around, and Colin noticed that it did so by turning its head instead of moving its eyes.⁵

Colin held his breath, afraid of being heard up in the tree, but he apparently avoided the owlbear's notice, for it dropped back down on all fours and approached the honey. Soon, it was lapping intently at the jar, seemingly oblivious to all else. Griff took aim, drew a short breath, and let out with a quiet "hoot." Immediately, the owlbear reared up, and Griff tightened his finger on the trigger. There was the quick twang of the crossbow, and the bolt went lightning-quick into the owlbear's right eye.

The screech was incredible. Colin covered his ears with both hands, amazed at the sheer intensity of the creature's death-throes. After what seemed an eternity, but was probably closer to a few scarce minutes, the owlbear dropped to its side, dead.

Griff jumped down out of the tree, landing like a cat. Colin, less sure of himself, climbed down. "And that's that," said the grizzled veteran.

"How'd you know one shot would kill him?" asked Colin. I would have expected it to have taken more to bring down something that big."

"And it would have, too, if I hadn't coated the bolt in poison," replied Griff. "As it was, did you see how long it took to die? He was dead as soon as the bolt hit, it just took him a while to realize it."⁶

Colin was shocked. He had always dreamed of being a hero, and idolized Griff as the epitome of everything he hoped to be himself, someday. But somehow, shooting at a creature with a poisoned crossbow bolt just didn't seem, well, heroic. Sadly, he realized his respect for his mentor had just dropped several notches.

While Colin was overcoming his shock, Griff had pulled out his long knife, and was beginning to skin the carcass. "Meat's not worth much, not the best eating, **but** a bearskin's a bearskin, even if there's only half a bear,"

"What's this?" asked Colin, picking up a tight oval bundle the size of his fist. It seemed organic, and had little bits of bone sticking out.

Griff glanced up from his skinning. "Owlbear pellet. The beasts spit them up like a cat with furballs." Colin dropped the pellet and wiped his hands on his pants.⁷

The enraged screech of an owlbear split the air. Colin jumped and turned to Griff, half expecting to see the beast he was skinning sit up and continue its attack. But

no, the beast was dead, no doubt about it. The ear-splitting call was coming from behind them, from the cave mouth. As the two looked on with growing horror, another owlbear shambled forth on its hind legs, then dropped on all fours and charged.

"Run!" cried Griff, as he grabbed up his crossbow and hurried to load it. Colin was back at the oak and about to scurry up it into safety, when concern for his mentor made him look back. There was a twang from the weapon, and Colin grimaced when he saw the bolt fly past the head of the enraged beast. Then the owlbear was upon Griff, sending the man and the crossbow flying off in different directions with one swipe of its paw.⁸

Colin stood transfixed by the scene before him. Griff lay on the ground, obviously stunned, and the owlbear loomed above him, rearing up, blood dripping from one set of claws. Colin could run, either to the safety of the tree or back the way he came, but either way, his mentor and personal hero was dead.

Or, he could face the owlbear himself and buy Griff some time.

Grabbing up his walking stick, Colin yelled at the great beast, catching its attention. The giant head snapped in his direction, and it came toward the new threat.

Gotta even the odds, Colin thought. If I can blind him . . .

The boy dropped to one knee and scooped up a handful of loose dirt. He flung it straight into the creature's face, and leapt to the side. To his surprise, the owlbear matched his move, not bothered in the least by the cloud of grit and sand.⁹

"Griff!" Colin shouted, as he narrowly dodged a swipe of wicked claws. Sparing a quick glance in his mentor's direction, he saw that Griff was starting to come around. He also saw the crossbow lying in the dirt, its string severed by the owlbear's attack. Swinging his walking stick like a staff, Colin managed to land a blow to the side of the owlbear's head, but the attack didn't seem to bother it in the least. Colin did his best to keep out of the creature's reach, backing up in a circle.

"Griff! You okay?" Sweat was starting to pour into Colin's eyes, but he didn't have the time to wipe it away. Keeping the owlbear at bay was taking every ounce of his concentration.

"Fine," Griff replied, as he staggered to his feet. Out of the corner of his eye, Colin got a look at his mentor. Three long gashes scarred the side of his face, and one eye was covered in blood. Whether the eye itself was damaged or not, Colin couldn't tell, but he couldn't possibly see out of it in his present state. "Keep him busy," he said, pulling out his sword.

Colin tried, but as Griff approached from the side, the owlbear suddenly spun and attacked. Griff did some furious backpedalling to avoid its grasp, and tripped over the carcass of the first beast.¹⁰ Colin jabbed his stick against the creature's head

like a spear, managing to do little damage, but at least drawing the beast's attention away from Griff as he scrambled back up to his feet.

Colin was tiring rapidly. He sensed there was little hope that the two of them could overcome the owlbear; it seemed to sense their every move, and knew that the greatest weapon it faced was the sword, for it turned its attention to Griff every time he approached. The older fighter was weary as well, and it was only a matter of time before one or both of them went down. If I could only keep its attention, Colin thought.

And then an idea sprang to his head. Before he had time to think too much about it, he held his walking stick horizontally out in front of him, and charged the owlbear.

The beast reared up, but Colin dodged between the raised forelimbs and pressed himself against the owlbear's chest, forcing his stick into its open beak. Immediately, he felt himself in the crushing grip of the owlbear's hug, and even though he started to see blackness in the periphery of his vision, he held onto the stick, keeping the monster's beak from snapping at him.¹¹

Colin could feel his ribs starting to crack. "Hurry," he tried to say, but couldn't get the word out for lack of breath. Fortunately, the advice was unnecessary, for Griff had leapt onto the owlbear's back and stabbed down with his sword at the base of the creature's neck. The sword went in deep, and Colin felt the monster's grip slacken a little, even as he felt consciousness slipping away from him. The owlbear bit down in pain, finally snapping Colin's stick in half, and it spun its head around, almost 180 degrees, until it was staring at Griff with its huge, yellow eyes. Griff snarled back at it, and sawed with his sword at the creature's wound. The owlbear dropped Colin's limp form and spun in circles, trying to reach the man on its back, but finally, the beast fell to the ground itself, done in by loss of blood from its neck wound. Griff collapsed next to the dead beast.

Sometime later, Griff managed to crawl back to his feet, and stumble to the backpack. There, he unwrapped the single *potion of healing* he always carried. Staggering back to the boy, he poured it down Colin's throat, and he awoke, choking and sputtering.

"You okay, kid?"

"Yeah, I'm okay. How about you? Your eye!"

"I'll be fine."

"But the potion! You should have—"

"Forget it, kid. You deserved it. That was just about the bravest thing I've ever seen. Bravest, or stupidest, I'm not quite sure just yet. But I'll be okay once we get back to town, and to a healer."

"Should we go, then?"

"Yeah, we should. But first we'd better check out the cave. Just to make sure."

"But if there's another one, we're in no shape . . ." Colin protested.

"No argument there, kid, but it should be okay. Owlbears might settle down with a mate, but you'll never find more than one mated pair in the same den. Now, cubs, that's another matter, and we'd best have a look to be sure, but owlbear cubs are a curious bunch, and I'm sure they'd have come out to see what all the noise was about."

Cautiously, the two entered the cave. Colin stopped to light a torch from the pack, and by the light it provided, they could see the cave interior was for the most part empty. Over in one corner, though, was a small pile of twigs and leaves, and mixed in with the pile were several white spherical objects two feet in diameter. "Bingo," said Griff. "Eggs. We're in luck, kid. These things go for 2,000 pieces of silver each."¹²

"We'll never carry them all off in our condition."

"Yeah, true, but do you think you could manage one? We can always come back for the others."

"Okay."

On the long way home, Colin hefting the owlbear egg, and Griff shouldering the broken crossbow and backpack, Colin asked his mentor a question that had been puzzling him.

"You know, I read that the owlbear was created by a wizard, a long time ago, as a guardian. And that he combined the strengths of both owls and bears to make his creation as formidable as possible!"

"Yeah, so?"

"Well, I've always wondered about that. You'd think that he'd have created the owlbear with wings. I mean, owls are practically silent when they fly. It just seems odd that he'd have missed so obvious an advantage."

"Let's just be glad he did, kid. Can you imagine if we had flying owlbears around here? I don't even want to think about it."

"I guess you're right."¹³

Notes

1. This is a common sight in owlbear-infested areas. The creatures claw at selected trees with their front paws. This not only keeps their claws sharp, but marks off an owlbear's territory.

2. Because of their great size and weight, owlbears are not good tree climbers. Anyone treed by an owlbear is not completely safe, though, because the beasts are just nasty enough to wait it out, and are often strong enough to knock over the tree, depending on the size of both the owlbear and the tree.

3. This appears to be the only exception to the owlbear's otherwise carnivorous diet. It remains well-adapted to honey-gathering, as its thick coat of fur and feathers protects it from bee stings, and it retains the long tongue of a bear, perfect for lapping up the sticky substance.

4. Like the owl, an owlbear has double

normal infravision, and quadruple normal hearing. In fact, the owlbear's hearing is so finely developed that it can attack normally in total darkness, and similarly can attack *invisible* creatures without penalty. Of course, this can be nullified with a *silence* spell.

5. Indeed, the owlbear's eyes are fixed in its head, looking straight ahead. It compensates for this by being able to turn its head a full 270 degrees, as compared to a human's 180. The owlbear has twice as many neck bones as does a human (fourteen to our seven) which allows for this flexibility. In addition, an owlbear can snap its neck from one position to another almost instantaneously.

6. The rugged constitution of an owlbear allows it to fight on for 1-4 rounds after it reaches 0 to -8 hit points. Once brought to -9 or fewer hit points, however, it is immediately slain.

7. Like owls, owlbears tear their food into chunks and swallow the chunks whole. Inside the stomach, much of the prey is digested, but bones, fur, feathers, and insect shells are churned into pellets, and regurgitated by the beast. These pellets are usually found near an owlbear's lair, and are thus a good indicator of an owlbear's presence nearby.

8. Owlbears, like humans, can rotate their forearms, and this gives them great strength and agility in seizing their prey. It is perhaps this feature alone which gives the owlbear its deadly ability to "hug" its opponents—and, as Griff just found out, allows them to make powerful side-swipes with their wicked claws.

9. Owlbears have a transparent third eyelid (also called a nictitating membrane) that they can flip across their eyes at will. This protects their sensitive eyes from dust, grit, and the like, but it also can protect them from strong light. Light spells are therefore ineffectual as blinding attacks against an owlbear.

10. So acute is the owlbear's sense of hearing that even in melee, it's almost impossible to sneak up on one. Owlbear ears are somewhat unique in that they are asymmetrical; one ear is higher than the other, and this makes it extremely efficient in pinpointing exactly where a particular sound is coming from. This fact has no doubt proven to be very unnerving to many a thief who tried using his ability to move silently to move past an owlbear.

11. Fortunately for Colin, once an owlbear gets a victim into a hug, it cannot use its claws to attack, relying on its crushing strength and sharp beak to kill its prey. Colin's surprise attack managed to neutralize the owlbear's claw and beak attacks, at the cost of automatic hugging damage each round.

12. Owlbear eggs are nearly perfect spheres. There will be from one to six eggs in an clutch; the eggs are laid several days apart. Once the young start to hatch, the parents provide them with freshly-killed meat. Owlbear "cubs" are carnivores

from the start, and even though the mother owlbear is half bear, she does not produce milk for her young. The young will be raised by the mother for the first two years, during which time she will teach the cubs how to hunt for themselves. After the end of the second year, the cubs will go off on their own and stake out their own territory.

13. The suggested revised experience-point value for owlbears with the extra abilities listed in this article is 650 XP.

In addition to the normal owlbear, there is also the arctic variety (hinted at in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL™* book), and, if your campaign world permits it, the winged variety.

Arctic owlbear

CLIMATE/TERRAIN: Any arctic

FREQUENCY Very rare

ORGANIZATION: Pack

ACTIVITY CYCLE: Day

DIET Carnivore

INTELLIGENCE: Low (5-7)

TREASURE: Incidental

ALIGNMENT Neutral

NO. APPEARING: 1 (2-8)

ARMOR CLASS: 5

MOVEMENT: 12, Sw 9

HIT DICE: 8 +2

THAC0: 13

NO. OF ATTACKS: 3

DAMAGE/ATTACK: **1-10/1-10/2-12**

SPECIAL ATTACKS: Hug, surprise

SPECIAL DEFENSES: Immunity to cold-based attacks

MAGIC RESISTANCE: Nil

SIZE: L (12' tall)

MORALE: Steady (11-12) + Special

XP VALUE: 2,000

Arctic owlbears are the polar cousins of the normal owlbear; they resemble a cross between a snowy owl and a polar bear. Both fur and feathers are a snowy white, while the claws and beak are both black. Yellow, glowing eyes look forward from a rounded head. Arctic owlbears speak the owlbear language, made up of loud screeches.

Combat: Arctic owlbears are as foul-tempered as their forest-dwelling cousins, immediately attacking prey with their front claws and wicked beak. They hug for 2-16 points of damage per round after scoring a claw hit with a roll of 18 or better. Once engaged in a hugging attack, the arctic owlbear cannot use its claws, but uses its beak to full advantage. A single attempt to break free from a hug is allowed; use the chance to bend bars/lift gates to determine success.

The arctic owlbear's fur and feathers are all multi-layered, protecting it from the coldest temperatures, even when wet. For this reason, the beasts are immune to all cold-based attacks. Additionally, due to their ability to blend into the arctic environment, they are 75% likely to surprise their prey.

Habitat/Society: Arctic owlbears live in the coldest areas of the arctic, often making their lairs in pre-existing caves or carving their own dens in banks of snow. However, they tend to be wanderers, constantly on the move in search of prey, and so do not settle in one place for very long. If encountered in their lair, a mated pair of arctic owlbears may have 1-6 eggs (20%) or young (80%) with them; there is only a 25% chance of one or the other. The young will be from 40% to 70% grown, fighting as creatures with 5 or 6 Hit Dice. Damage from an immature arctic owlbear is 1-6/1-6/2-8, and characters get a bonus of +20% to their bend bars/lift gates roll when trying to escape from a hug.

Ecology: Arctic owlbears live for about 20 years. They will prey on anything, but prefer seal meat above all else. Unlike normal owlbears, the arctic variety hunt primarily in the day, and, being good swimmers, will pursue their prey into the frigid waters without hesitation. They are well-equipped for their environment—rough, leathery pads on the bottom of their paws help them maintain stability over icy surfaces. The local inhabitants of arctic regions say that there's nothing worse than having an arctic owlbear on your trail, because of their stubborn de-

termination, nasty disposition, and constant hunger.

Winged owlbear

CLIMATE/TERRAIN: Any nonarctic
FREQUENCY: Very rare
ORGANIZATION: Family
ACTIVITY CYCLE: Late afternoon/early evening
DIET: Carnivore
INTELLIGENCE: Low (5-7)
TREASURE: Incidental
ALIGNMENT: Neutral
NO. APPEARING: 1 (2-5)
ARMOR CLASS: 5
MOVEMENT: 12, Fl 18 (E)
HIT DICE: 5 + 2
THACO: 15
NO. OF ATTACKS: 3
DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1-6/1-6/2-12
SPECIAL ATTACKS: Hug, surprise
SPECIAL DEFENSES: Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE: Nil
SIZE: L (8' tall, 20' wingspan)
MORALE: Steady (11-12) + Special
XP VALUE: 975

The winged owlbear is the ultimate synthesis of owl and bear. It looks like a standard owlbear, but in addition it has a pair of large wings growing from its shoulders. They are just as nasty-tempered as their ground-dwelling cousins, and speak the same language of screeches.

Combat: Winged owlbears fight as the wingless variety, utilizing their front claws, sharp beaks, and mighty hug. In addition, they are almost totally silent in flight due to the construction of their wing feathers, and this imposes a -6 penalty on opponents' surprise rolls.

Habitat/Society: Winged owlbears can be found in almost any nonarctic environment (when they can be found at all—they are very scarce), but seem to prefer wooded forests and mountainous terrains. Due to their flight capabilities, winged owlbears tend to claim larger territories as "theirs"—usually ten to twenty square miles.

Winged owlbears live in mated pairs. If encountered in their lairs, there is a 25% chance there will be 1-3 eggs (20%) or young (80%) in addition to the adults. The young are identical to normal owlbear young, as their wings will not support them in flight until they are at full size.

Ecology: Winged owlbears tend to live slightly longer than the normal variety, often reaching 25 years or so. They are sought after by wizards, even though to date no one has managed to domesticate one; nonetheless, eggs can go as high as 4,000 silver pieces, while the price for live young can reach 10,000 silver pieces.

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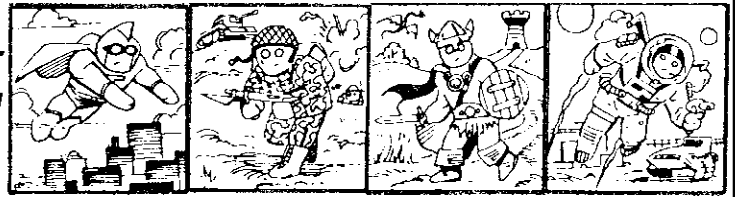
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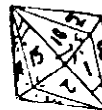
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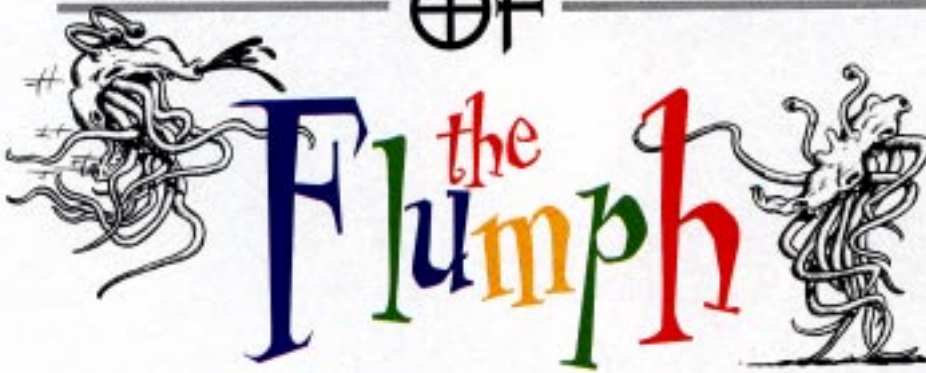
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"WELL THEN, if there is no further business," said Dreelix, his gavel raised in the air to strike the table, "I hereby declare this meeting of the Monster Hunters Associa—"

He was cut off in mid-sentence by a commotion in the doorway. Buntleby bustled into the meeting hall, out of breath and with a large, squirming sack tucked under one arm. Ozzie, his osquip familiar, trotted obediently at his feet. "I'm sorry I'm late," he said, "but I was unavoidably detained."

"Late?" squeaked Dreelix. "I was just about to adjourn! You must learn to be a bit more punctual if you wish to continue in this prestigious . . . guh! By the gods! What is that smell?"

Dreelix wasn't the only one to notice. All around the room, the collected wizards and sages that made up the Monster Hunters Association were getting a good whiff of the stench that Buntleby seemed to have brought into the meeting hall with him. Throughout the room, nostrils flared and noses wrinkled in disgust. Lady Ablasta raised a perfumed handkerchief to her nose and pretended not to notice as others administered

table napkins or bits of their own cloaks or robes in an attempt to ward off the vile odor.

"Oh, that. Sorry. I sort of had a little encounter on the way here..." Buntleby reached into his bag and pulled out its contents—a whitish, disk-shaped creature with writhing tentacles on top.

"I don't want to hear about it! Get out of here with that thing!"

"Wait!" said Spontayne, a taciturn scholar who seldom spoke up. "Is that what I think it is?"

"Beats me," said Buntleby. "I haven't the foggiest idea what the thing is. I was hoping maybe Willowquisp could tell us."

Willowquisp the Zoophile, an elderly sage with a fondness for all of nature's creatures—even the silly ones—squinted over at his friend. "Why, bless my soul!" he said. "That looks like a flumph!" Spontayne nodded his head in agreement.

"It attacked one of my osquips," Buntleby said. "I managed to capture it, but not before it squirted some foul-smelling gunk all over me. It seems harmless enough now, but it has some unusual properties, and I thought maybe the Association might want to study it."

"Fine, fine," agreed Dreelix, barely understandable as he spoke with his left hand over his nose and mouth. "I hereby appoint Willowquisp, Spontayne, and Buntleby as a subcommittee to study the creature. Zantoulios, maybe you'd better join them. Any questions? Good. Meeting adjourned!" And without another word, he jumped up from the head table and rushed out the door into the fresh night air.

Zantoulios wasn't the most powerful wizard among the Monster Hunters, but he did have the best-equipped lab, filled with the most modern equipment. He prided himself on being on the cutting edge of magical experimentation technology. Perhaps more truthfully, the reason his paraphernalia was so new was it was constantly being replaced after Zantoulios' experiments blew up in his face. He still hadn't lived down his recent attempt to use a summoned fire elemental to test the flame-resisting properties of a new magical oil. The battered sword he had coated in the oil survived just fine; the lab, converted from an old wooden barn, didn't fare quite as well.

Buntleby arrived at Zantoulios' recently-restored laboratory to find the other three members of the newly-created subcommittee already there. Willowquisp was seated at a table, poring over a large book he had brought with him, with Spontayne the Studious looking over his shoulder and nodding occasionally to himself. Zantoulios was pouring brandy into four beakers.

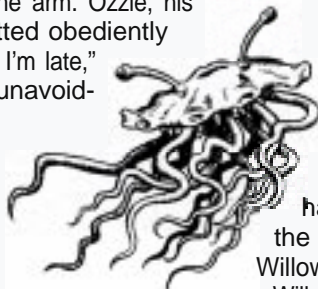
"Hope you don't mind the glassware, Buntleby; I brought the bottle but left the glasses back at the house."

"That's fine. Why'd you build the lab so far away from the house, though? Seems a bit inconvenient."

"It's, uh, safer that way," Zantoulios admitted. "I've had to rebuild the lab three times now after things . . . kind of got out of hand, but the house has managed to avoid any damage so far. Willowquisp? Spontayne? Some brandy? No? Suit yourselves. So, is that the beast?"

Buntleby took the beaker and placed his sack on the worktable. It shifted and wiggled around as the flumph inside it tried vainly to escape. "Thanks," he said to his host. "So, where should we start?"

Willowquisp cleared his throat. "Spontayne and I have been reading

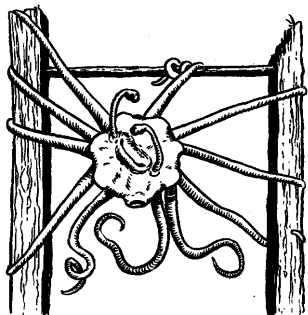




up on it, and you're right: there are some rather interesting features about the creature. Why don't you start by telling us how you came across it?"

Buntleby sipped his brandy and began his tale. "Well, I had just walked out the door and was on my way to the meeting hall when I heard a squeal from the direction of the osquip pen around back. I dashed to the back and found the flumph perched atop one of my osquips—Squinty—with its tentacles wrapped around his body to hold it in place. I ran forward to pull the thing off, when it spotted me with its eyestalks.¹ It immediately let go of Squinty and rose up into the air. I saw its base swivel slightly,² and before I knew it, I was being sprayed with this liquid that—well, you all got a whiff of it, and that was after it had worn off a bit.³"

"It stunk even worse than Grindle's patented garlic and onion stew!" suggested Zantoulios.



1. A flumph's eyestalks can move independently of one another, giving it a wide field of vision. As the creatures are nocturnal, flumphs have infravision to a range of 60 feet. They have no eyelids and so cannot close their eyes, even during sleep. For this reason, they are seldom surprised in visually-oriented situations. (For example, it would be difficult to walk up to one without it being aware of the approach.) On the other hand, they tend to take more damage from light-based assaults (for example, they save at -2 against *light* spells cast on them to temporarily blind them).

If an eyestalk or tentacle is severed, it takes about a week to grow back. One-eyed flumphs strike at -2 to hit due to a lack of depth perception; those missing a tentacle or two are not impeded and cause full damage with their acid attacks.

2. The flumph hovers by an innate form of anti-gravity, but it maneuvers by means of several small holes along the rim of its disk-shaped body. A mouth-like organ on its top takes in air, which can be expelled by any of the holes along the rim. Air being jetted out the back of the flumph's body propels it forward; air jetted from the creature's left sends it to the right, and so on.

The air jets propel the creature horizontally, while it moves vertically at will by means of its anti-gravity ability. Its tentacles are used like rudders, enabling the creature to spin clockwise or counter-clockwise, depending on the placement of the tentacles as it forces air out one of its rim holes. This is important in lining up its defensive spray, as the liquid can be expelled from only one of the eight rim holes. This one rim hole is usually referred to as the creature's "front" (a somewhat arbitrary position on a radially-symmetrical creature).

"Anyway," continued Buntleby, "there was a butterfly net at the side of the house, so I grabbed it up thinking to capture the creature for study. Meanwhile, Squinty was running around in a panic at my feet, and in all of the confusion, I sort of..." He winced in memory of the event, and stopped talking.

"Tripped over him?" guessed Willowquisp.

"Stepped on him, actually," admitted Buntleby. "On his head."

"Oof!" said Willowquisp. "Is he okay?"

Buntleby grimaced. "He bit his tongue."

"That's not so bad," pointed out Spontayne.

"Off," added Buntleby. "You know what their teeth are like?"

"Poor thing."

"Getting back to the flumph..." suggested Willowquisp.

"Oh, right. Well, stepping on Squinty put my swing a little off. I twisted my ankle and went plummeting to the ground, but on the way down I gave the net a wild swing at the flumph. I hit him on one side, but as it turned out this was a lucky break, because instead of catching him in the net I flipped the creature over in mid-air, and it crashed to the ground on its back. It seems to be helpless when its upside-down."⁴

3. A flumph's defensive spray squirts out in a 60° arc from its "front," with a range of 20 feet. The liquid is extremely foul-smelling, something of a unappealing melange of skunk musk, rotting cabbages, and the unwashed armpits of a sweaty, overweight orc. The stench causes those struck to save vs. poison or be unable to attack for 2-5 rounds due to extreme nausea and dizziness. The odor from this attack lasts for up to 4 hours and is detectable from 100 feet away. (This scent could easily attract wandering monsters.) The flumph's spray attack also propels it in the opposite direction, since the attack emanates from one of its rim holes. A flumph can use its spray only once every ten rounds.

4. A flumph is virtually helpless when placed on its back, even more so than a turtle. The creature's innate anti-gravity is aimed downward from the creature's lower side, making it useless if the flumph is flipped over. Its many tentacles are capable of delicate maneuvering but do not possess much strength, so the flumph is unable to flip itself over by grasping at nearby handholds. Furthermore, its "maneuvering jets" cannot be employed unless it is levitating, and this includes the one responsible for its defensive spray. To add insult to injury, its long eyestalks are pinned by its body when overturned, so the creature cannot even get a good look at what is going on around it.

5. Although the flumph's "mouth" is on its upper surface, it is used for air intake only. The creature actually feeds by means of several small spikes located centrally on its underside, surrounded by its tentacles. The flumph drops down on its prey (mostly frogs, lizards, and small rodents), piercing the victim's body with the spikes for 1d8 hp damage. It then introduces acid

"Yes, that's mentioned in my book," noted Willowquisp. "So then what?"

"Well, I fixed Squinty up as best as I could—poured a *potion of healing* down his throat, you know, the cherry-flavored kind he likes. His back was scarred from the flumph's attack,⁵ but the potion healed him up okay. So I threw the flumph into an old potato sack and raced to make it to the meeting in time. I guess that's about it."

"So what prompted you to bring the creature to the Association for study?" asked Willowquisp.

"Well, I figured there's got to be something we can make out of it. Zantoulios?"

"Well, you've got our procedures backward: usually, we come across a formula for a new spell or a magical item, find out what strange body parts we need, and then plan a Hunt accordingly.

But still, we'll see what we can come up with. Hmm, hovering: *potions of levitation*, perhaps, or spell components for *levitate*, or possibly reverse *gravity* spells..." he muttered to himself, his mind already examining the possibilities. "Acid secretions: tentacles might be useful in *oil of acid resistance*, possibly tie it in somehow with a *Melf's acid* arrow spell? Maybe. Smelly squirting liquid: *stinking cloud* spell components, perhaps . . . I'll have to check my formulae."⁶ He

into the wounds by means of its tentacles. Each tentacle is hollow, much like an elephant's trunk, and is highly flexible. While some tentacles entwine around the prey in an effort to hold it still, others secrete acid, causing an additional 1d4 hp damage for the next 2d4 rounds. The acid is produced in the flumph's lower body cavity; anyone piercing a flumph's underside (AC 8) from below is hit with a shower of acid causing damage as noted above. The acid is highly potent, requiring active washing with 2-8 gallons of water or immersion in a swiftly-moving stream in order to remove it completely; simple immersion is not enough.

Once the prey is dead and the acid has had enough time to liquefy the creature partially, the flumph sucks up nutrients through its tentacles. In this respect it is similar to most spiders, whose venom liquefies the insides of its captured prey, allowing the spider to "drink" its victims.

6. The brain of a flumph—a small organ located just under the creature's upper shell, midway between its mouth and its rear rim hole—when pulverized, produces a liquid useful in the production of *potions of levitation*. One flumph brain provides enough liquid for three such potions.

The inner layer of hollow flumph tentacles can be removed and used as one of the ingredients for *oil of acid resistance*. It takes about 20 tentacles for one application of this magical oil.

The gland that stores the flumph's defensive spray can be used as an alternate material component for the *stinking cloud* spell. If used for this purpose, any flumphs within one mile of the spells effect have a 50% chance of investigating the *stinking cloud*.

busied himself in the back of the lab, digging through a pile of disorganized notes and books filled with his tiny scrawlings.

Buntleby pulled the flumph out of the sack and looked at it in the light of the laboratory, careful to keep it upside-down. It was entirely white, from the eyestalks to the tentacles. Even its short little spikes were a whitish-gray, although there were specks of dried blood staining a good number of them. Its eyes were a dark blue, almost black, and it looked at Buntleby with an unfathomable expression. Was it angry at its captivity? Curious? Frightened? Buntleby had no way to know.

"Look how long the eyestalks are," said Buntleby, holding up the flumph for his companions to see. "I wonder why they're so long?"

"By necessity, no doubt," suggested Willowquisp, looking up from his tome. "If it spends its life in the air and drops down on its prey, it would have to be able to see past its own body."

"Makes sense," admitted Buntleby. On a whim, he placed the inverted flumph on his own head, and held its eyestalks together under his chin. "Here we go," he said, "A new hat for Lady Ablasta." Tilting his head back so he could look down his nose at his companions, he scrunched his face into a lemon-sucking configuration and did his best Lady Ablasta imitation. "I'm sure you young

men cannot *possibly* appreciate just how *proper* and *fashionable* my new headgear is. But of course, such is to be expected of the *uncouth* members of today's society."

Willowquisp chuckled and held out his hand, and Buntleby passed the flumph over to him, careful to keep it upside-down. Willowquisp tested the sharpness of the creature's spikes with his finger, and offered, "There are times I'd be sorely tempted to place



this little fellow, as is, on Dreelix's chair."

"That would be a sight!" agreed Buntleby, placing the flumph down on a chair and wagging his butt over it as if about to sit. Even Spontayne, normally slow to join in any jocularity, allowed a grin to cross his face as he pictured Dreelix sitting on a flumph.

Buntleby picked the creature back up, then examined its shell. "Hey, feel how hard the top is, compared to the bottom,"⁷ he said.

Spontayne gave a rap on the creature's top, then poked a finger into its squishy, pliant underside. The flumph responded with a squeaky "wheel!" of exhaled air, as if ticklish. "Almost like a turtle's shell," he said. "Odd that they can fly with so much weight on top."

"No, really, its not that heavy at all. Here, feel for yourself." Buntleby passed the creature over to his mentor.

"Amazingly light," agreed Spontayne.

"Perhaps the shell could be used in the construction of lightweight armor of some type."

"Possibly. Or maybe a buckler, or something." He took the creature back from Spontayne and carried it over to Zantoulios, who was buried in a pile of arcane formulae and research notes, many of which had spilled out onto the floor. "Hey, take a peek at this texture. Think we could fashion some sort of armor from this?"

Zantoulios spun around at the sound of Buntleby's voice. His oversized book of notes bumped the flumph out of Buntleby's hands, and the creature spilled onto the floor. At the same time Buntleby's foot slid on a loose scrap of paper, one of Zantoulios' escaped notes that now littered the floor of his lab. He went crashing to the floor, jarring his funny bone in the process.

7. A flumph's upper surface is AC 0. During the daylight hours, the creature often flies up into a tree and settles on a sturdy branch, wrapping its tentacles around the branch for support. This leaves its hard upper shell exposed while protecting its softer underside while it sleeps. The eyestalks are retractable and can be whipped into the creature's body quickly if necessary, but the flumph usually keeps them out and facing opposite directions while sleeping. Flumph sleep is very light, and the creature remains somewhat aware of its surroundings at all times. If danger is

8. This noise is just incidental to the flumph's movement through the air and does not constitute a language. There is a flumph language, but it is a sign language based on tentacle and eyestalk movements, difficult for non-flumphs to learn and impossible for them to reproduce (short of using *polymorph* magic to take on the shape of a flumph themselves, or creating the illusion of a flumph and using it to do the "talking").

The flumph landed on its edge and began spinning across the floor like a runaway wheel. Zantoulios made a grab for it but slipped himself and landed hard on his face, shooting a stack of notes detailing the marvelous new uses he'd found for troglodyte bladders flying out behind him.

"Stop it!" Buntleby yelled, crawling to his feet. "Don't let it get away!"

Willowquisp and Spontayne looked up from the thick zoological tome Willowquisp had brought, to see the flumph barreling across the floor at them in a bee-line, tentacles splayed out on one side and eyestalks splayed out on the other. It hit Spontayne's foot and tipped over, wobbling in a small circle along its circumference like a dropped coin between the two men.

"Look out!" yelled Zantoulios. "It's flipped up! Grab it, quick!"

Willowquisp bent over to grab the flumph. Spontayne did the same, and the sound of their heads colliding could be heard clear across the lab. Both staggered backward, and the flumph shot up into the air between them.

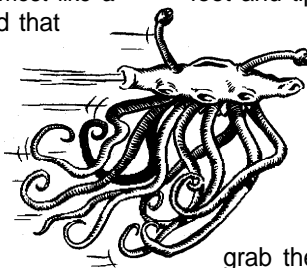
In an instant, the flumph reached a height of ten feet, well out of the range of the four humans below, where it teetered drunkenly and attempted to regain its balance. Spontayne staggered over and slammed the shutters closed on the lab window, preventing its escape. "Now what?" he asked.

"Got that butterfly net with you?" asked Zantoulios. Buntleby shook his head. "What about spells?"

Buntleby took a quick mental survey. "Nothing of use," he admitted. "You?"

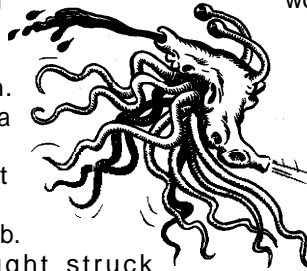
"Sadly, no. Wait a minute, though, I've got an idea." He disappeared into a back room.

The flumph circled around the room slowly, eyestalks waving back and forth as it looked for a way out. It had apparently regained its equilibrium and



9. Flumphs have no regular feeding schedule. They almost always attack rodents on sight, regardless of how recently they have fed, leading some to believe that flumphs prefer a rodent diet, or that they were specifically bred as a farming aid to cut down on the rodent population. They will also eat small creatures such as lizards, frogs, and snakes, but given a choice will always go after rodents first. A flumph sees killing rats and mice as a sacred duty to be performed whenever possible.

scooted about along a horizontal plane well out of reach of the humans below. The three Monster Hunters could hear a low whistling as air passed through its maneuvering jets.⁸ It glided aerially along one wall, did a quick pirouette, and floated along the next wall, eyestalks in constant motion. Suddenly, its eyes did a double-take, and in a burst of speed it maneuvered over to the far corner of the lab.



A sudden thought struck Buntleby. "Where's Ozzie?" he cried. The flumph positioned itself over the osquip, making final adjustments as it aligned itself above its unwitting prey. "No!" screamed Buntleby as he leapt across the room toward his familiar?⁹

The two reached Ozzie at about the same moment. Buntleby curled protectively over his familiar, and the flumph ended up landing on Buntleby's shoulder. He felt a brief prick of pain as several of the creature's spikes penetrated the layers of his robe, but then the flumph, surprised by the loss of its prey, zoomed back up into the air.

It didn't get far. Zantoulios, brandishing a *staff of striking* he'd been meaning to recharge, gave a blood-curdling scream as he charged across the room and smacked the creature between the eyestalks. The flumph teetered and tottered in the air, wobbling crazily as it tried to regain its balance. Not surprisingly, it let loose with its defensive spray, catching Buntleby, Zantoulios, and Ozzie in their faces.

Zantoulios dropped his staff, recoiling in disgust.

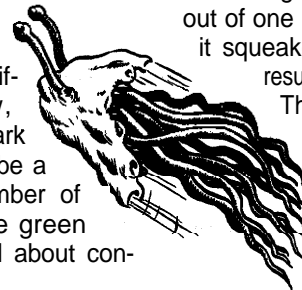
Spontayne made a grab for a wand on the worktable and tossed it over to Zantoulios. The gangly wizard caught it, spoke a command word, and the air became more breathable at once. The slim black wand had an inflatable bag at one end. As the bag filled with air, the stench became less and less noticeable. "Troglydye bladder. Good thinking Spontayne." Spontayne merely grunted his agreement and went over to check on Buntleby. Zantoulios picked up his staff and looked up at the flumph, hovering just out of reach.

"So now what do we do?" asked Willowquisp.

There was a loud bang at the shuttered window. All eyes turned toward it, including those of the flumph.¹⁰ The shutters buckled once, twice, and then crashed open. To the Monster Hunters' amazement, a hammer-shaped field of energy floated into the room, followed by a pair of flumphs.

These flumphs were different-greenish-yellow, with tentacles shaded dark green. There seemed to be a considerably greater number of tentacles present on the green flumphs, and they waved about constantly.¹¹

The white flumph hovered up to the newcomers and performed an intricate series of movements with its tentacles and eyestalks, one tentacle



pointed accusingly in Buntleby's direction. The green ones positioned themselves between the white flumph and the startled humans below.

Spontayne was bent over Buntleby, both caught staring up at the strange creatures hovering above them. Willowquisp the Zoophile held his large tome up like a shield as if to ward off any evil spells the things might hurl at him. Zantoulios stood with an enlarged troglodyte bladder on a stick in one hand and a staff in the other, ready to strike. Under the creatures' gaze, he lowered the staff to the floor and gave a sickly chuckle, his oversized Adam's-apple following his nervous gulps down his throat.

Buntleby felt a gathering of magical energy about him, and found that he was unable to move. From the corner of his eye he saw the others were immobile as well, and from the look of puzzlement on Willowquisp's face he figured the sage had never been in the grip of a *hold person* spell before.¹²

One of the green flumphs sucked in a large breath of air from its dorsal mouth-organ and forced a few words out of one of its rim holes.¹³ "Not evil," it squeaked, evidently revealing the

results of a quick detect evil spell.

The *spiritual hammer* winked out of existence behind it. "Explain behavior."

Suddenly, Buntleby could move again—apparently, he had been released from the spell.

He looked at his companions, but they remained immobilized. It seemed that he was to be their spokesman.

10. Although flumphs have no external ears, they do have a sense of hearing on a par with that of a human. They do, in fact, have four inner ears spaced equidistant around their bodies just below their maneuvering jets. They have an excellent sense of touch in the tips of their tentacles but a weak sense of smell (based on the mouth-like organ on their upper surface) and no sense of taste.

Their sense of smell is somewhat unique in its extreme sensitivity to one particular scent—the odor of their own defensive spray. A flumph is able to pick up that one scent from over a mile away. This means when a flumph uses its spray, it is also alerting all other flumphs in the immediate vicinity that a dangerous situation has arisen. Being lawful good creatures, any flumph picking up the defensive odor heads toward the scent to assist if it can.

11. Monastic flumphs are a higher order of flumph, able to cast priest spells as if they were clerics of equal level to their hit dice. At 2-5 HD, this gives them access to priest spells of first to third level. These spells are modified versions of the spells known to PCs, requiring only somatic gestures, which they perform with consummate skill with their numerous tentacles. Monastic

flumphs have a larger number of tentacles than do common flumphs; while this enables them to cast spells, it also leaves less room on their undersides for spikes, and as a result monastic flumphs cause only 1d6 hp damage instead of the common flumph's 1d8.

Little is known about the mysterious monastic flumphs. They gather together in large caverns to worship unknown, lawful good deities. Each monastic flumph society is called a "cloister," led by a 5-HD "abbot," 3-or 4-HD "priors" (one per six flumphs in the cloister), and a handful of 2-HD "monks." Cloisters commonly hold up to 32 individual monastic flumphs, who act as guardians for the common flumphs and pursue their own mysterious interests.

Most of what little is known of the monastic flumphs was documented by one Cartifant the Learned, a curious sage with a penchant for unusual field-work. It was he who gave the monastic flumphs their religious-based titles, and since so little has been written about the creatures, the terms "cloister," "abbot," "prior," and "monk" have become common usage in describing monastic flumph society.

Had Cartifant finished his field-work with the monastic flumphs (tragically, he was killed in a

rare butter-churning accident), he might have learned the true relationship between ordinary flumphs and the monastic variety. Monastic flumphs are not a higher order of flumph so much as normal flumphs are a lower order of monastic flumph—specifically, their idiot mutant children. About 10% of monastic flumph buds grow into albino flumphs. While these creatures are lower in intelligence and cannot cast spells, they are nonetheless cherished and looked after by the lawful good monastic flumphs. The albinos always breed true, so over time, the "normal" flumphs came to far outnumber the monastic ones.

12. Since monastic flumphs cast their spells using only somatic gestures with their many tentacles and also move their tentacles when communicating with others of their species, there is usually no warning for an outside observer that a monastic flumph is casting a spell.

13. A very few monastic flumphs (about 10%) have mastered the Common tongue or another verbal language. They do not speak often, and when they do it is in short bursts of words as they force air out of their rim holes. A speaking monastic flumph sounds like it just took in a lungful of helium and is trying to do a Mickey Mouse impression.

"Why fight?" asked the green flumph in its high-pitched voice.

"We were, uh, defending ourselves," he began.

The green flumph that had spoken pointed at the white flumph with a thin tentacle. "Why attack?" it demanded in its squeaky voice.

"Well, he started it! He attacked one of my osquips!"

The flumph swung its eyestalks to stare down at Ozzie. "Kill vermin."

"Ozzie's not vermin! He's my familiar and my friend!" As if understanding the flumphs' motives, Ozzie prudently scooted behind Buntleby's feet and hid from the hovering creatures.

The flumph swung its eyes back to Buntleby. "Not vermin?" it asked, surprised.

"Definitely not!"

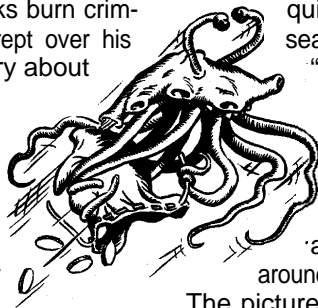
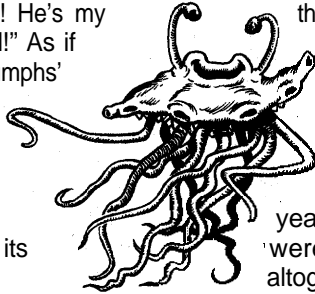
"Not vermin?" it asked again. The green flumph pointed his two eyeballs at each other in confusion, then seemed to give a mental shrug. It pointed a tentacle at its white-skinned cousin, and said, "Not hat."

Buntleby felt his cheeks burn crimson as embarrassment crept over his face. "Yes, well, I'm sorry about that," he mumbled.

"Not cushion. No sit."

Buntleby's face grew even redder.

"Look, I think there's been a terrible misunderstanding on both our parts. I apologize for the way we've treated your friend here, and I see now that no harm was meant on your part toward my osquips, too. How about we just admit to our misunderstandings and each go our own separate ways?"



The flumphs stared at the Monster Hunters for a few seconds, then turned and waggled tentacles at each other. "Agreed," said the flumph spokesman. With a puff of air, it swoveled around on its central axis and jetted out the window, the other two creatures following behind it.

Movement returned to the other Monster Hunters. "Well I'll be," remarked Zantoulios. "I think we were just scolded. What were those things, his parents?"

"Unlikely," Wiliowquisp replied, flipping through his book once again. "Flumphs have but a single parent- they reproduce asexually by budding, once every two years or so. No, I believe they were a different type of flumph altogether. My tome here hints at a race of spellcasting flumphs, and I think that's what we just saw."

"So the little white guy just got rescued by two of his more powerful cousins," remarked Buntleby, bending down to his familiar and stroking him behind the ears.

"And I'd say we were lucky at that," said Wiliowquisp, flipping quickly through his book in search of a particular page.

"We got off easy in only having to deal with a spell-using flumph; we could have been facing one of these, instead!" Finding the page he was after, he flipped the book around so his friends could see.

The picture showed a creature that looked like nothing so much as a giant brain, from which grew a parrot-like beak and ten long tentacles. From the way it was drawn on the page, it was obvious that the creature was hovering in mid-air.

Another creature believed to be related to the flumph is the belabra, or "tangler." Somewhat more primitive than either the flumph or the grell, the jellyfish-shaped creature cannot levitate or fly, but instead glides after a springing leap that can take it 60 yards at a time. The creature has 12 rubbery tentacles, a hard, bony upper shell, and four dorsal eyestalks. Further evidence of flumph ancestry is the fact that when a tentacle is severed, the creature sprays its blood at enemies, which has a debilitating effect on them. Belabra also reproduce through budding, as do flumphs. Many sages believe the belabra to be a precursor to both the flumph and grell species. Further information on belabra can be found in MC3: FORGOTTEN REALMS® Appendix, under "Belabra (Tangler)."

"A grell?" asked Buntleby. "I've never heard of them."¹⁴

"You're lucky never to have met one," said Zantoulios. "I don't think we'd have got off so easy if it was a couple of grell that burst in here."

There was silence for awhile, as each Monster Hunter reflected on what had just occurred. Finally, Zantoulios broke the silence.

"Actually, I'd prefer explaining to the Association that we lost our flumph to a daring raid by a couple of nasty grell, rather than admit that the four of us were bested by a little green.

flumph," he said with a squeaky voice.

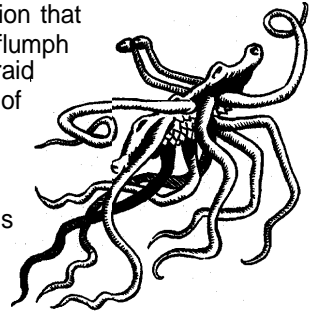
"Good point," admitted Buntleby, rubbing his sore shoulder.

"I think," suggested Willowquisp, "that after much investigation, we decided that flumphs are unsuitable for magical experimentation, and we let him go free."

"I like it," said Spontayne.

"Me too," agreed Buntleby.

"Good plan," said Zantoulios.



Johnathan M. Richards says he is very familiar with the concept of the nausea-inducing smell, since he grew up living across from a mushroom farm that brought in compost daily by the truckload, and currently lives downwind from a meat-rendering facility.

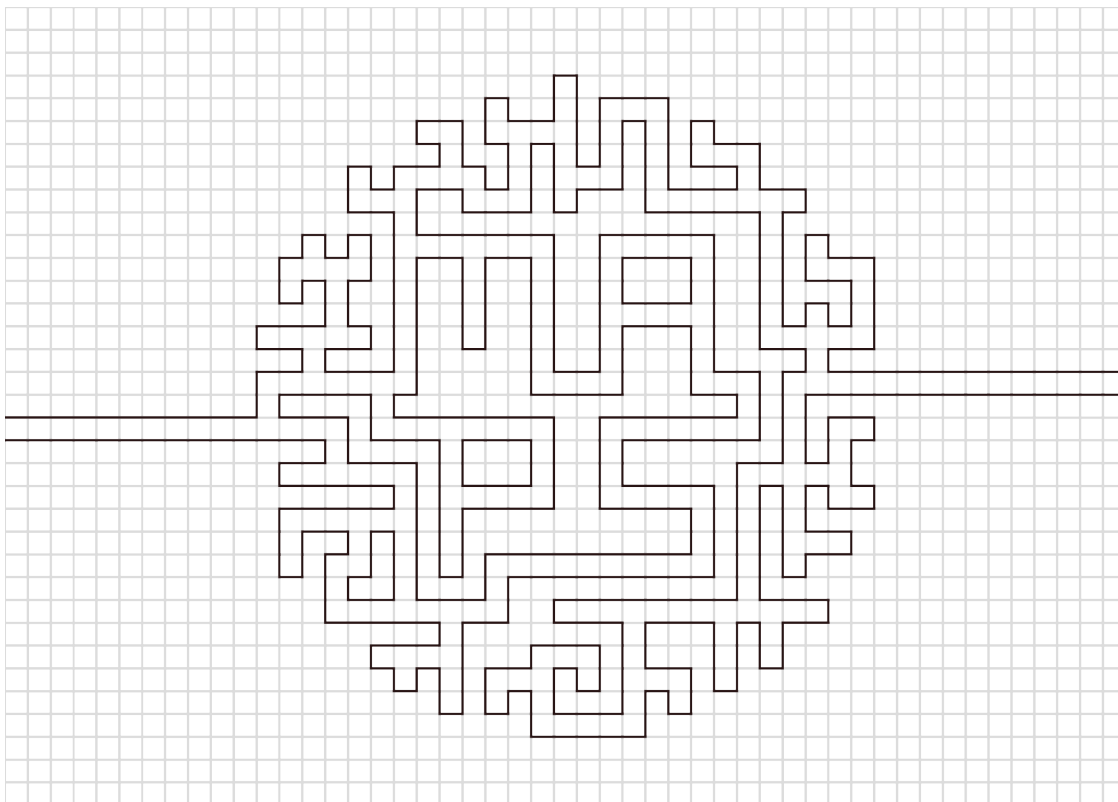
14. No grell would ever come to a flumph's rescue, although it is very possible that the flumph and the grell are genetically related. Sages point out the many similarities between the two creatures: both hover in the air by means of an innate ability; both have numerous tentacles; both drop down on prey from above; both are nomadic, seldom staying in one area for long. In addition, each has a solitary type (the common flumph and the rogue grell) as well as a "colony" type (the monastic flumph and the colonial grell). Further information on grell is available in the MONSTROUS MANUAL® tome (under "Grell"), MC5 GREYHAWK® Adventures Appendix (under "Grell"), and MC9: SPELLJAMMER® Appendix (under "Grell, Colonial").

The best guess regarding the flumph's origins, taking into account its probable genetic ties to the grell, is that flumphs originate from a different world. They may have traveled on grell spelljamming vessels (perhaps by design, but more likely without the grells' knowledge) and disembarked onto their new planet. Or, for that matter, it might have only been a single (monastic) flumph-since they reproduce asexually, it would only take a single flumph to found an entire race on a new world.

If this theory is true, it might also explain the "normal" flumph's existence-perhaps the albino mutation came about as a result of some subtle difference between this world and the monastic flumph's original home world.

Maps of the Month: Candlekeep Mysteries

Presenting maps and other art to help run your first encounters exploring Candlekeep!



***WARNING: THESE MAPS MAY CONTAIN SPOILERS FOR
CANDLEKEEP MYSTERIES.***

With the release of *Candlekeep Mysteries*, we're here to provide further resources to help Dungeon Masters set their adventures in this famed library citadel. This issue, we'll look at the anthology's first two encounters, providing you with their maps and illustrations (including material from *Candlekeep Mysteries*, as well as added creatures from the *Monster Manual*). Enjoy!



CANDLEKEEP

Standing atop a rocky crag overlooking the Sea of Swords, the massive citadel of Candlekeep has endured the elements for centuries and defied the degradations of time....

As noted in *Candlekeep Mysteries*, each adventure in this anthology embraces one of the following narrative ideas:

- The characters discover a book in the library that contains a mystery. Getting to the bottom of this mystery requires embarking on an adventure.
- The characters come to Candlekeep on a quest for information, perhaps to solve a crisis elsewhere in the world. During their research, they uncover a book and the mystery it contains, which leads to adventure.

If you're looking to dive straight in, we suggest keeping the following points in mind when introducing Candlekeep:

- Candlekeep is a massive citadel, housing a cloistered community of scholars and the largest repository of written lore in Faerûn.
- A legion of scholars and sages called the Avowed look after the library and remain vigilant in the care and cataloging of the knowledge it holds.

- The required entrance fee into Candlekeep is a work of writing not already collected therein.

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THE JOY OF EXTRADIMENSIONAL SPACES

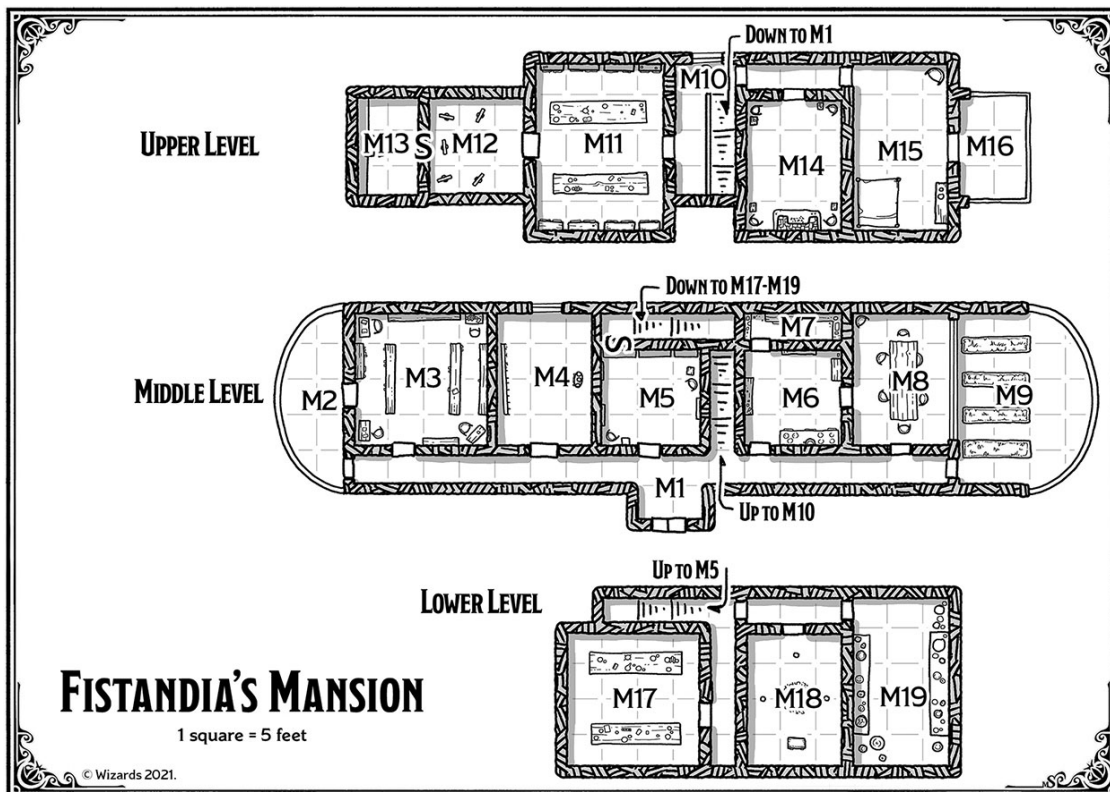
In this adventure for 1st level characters, a book leads parties on a quest to find a missing sage. Written by Michael Polkinghorn, you can [read our interview](#) with him from the previous issue.



Looking to get started quickly or run the adventure as a one-shot? In order to set events into motion as quickly as possible, consider the following:

- Have the characters already at Candlekeep. Presume they know each other, and have connections with a stricken town in need of aid.
- Inform the characters that the sage Matreous can provide their town the assistance they need; and that Matreous is also here at Candlekeep sequestered away studying a book on extradimensional spaces.
- Begin with the characters just outside Matreous's private study room, and the knowledge that he has not left it. As soon as they enter and find him missing, the adventure begins!

Two mysteries must now be solved. The first is the whereabouts of the missing sage Matreous. The characters can resolve this question by using the book found in the study room to open a portal to an extradimensional mansion. The larger mystery, however, is how to escape once they are trapped inside!



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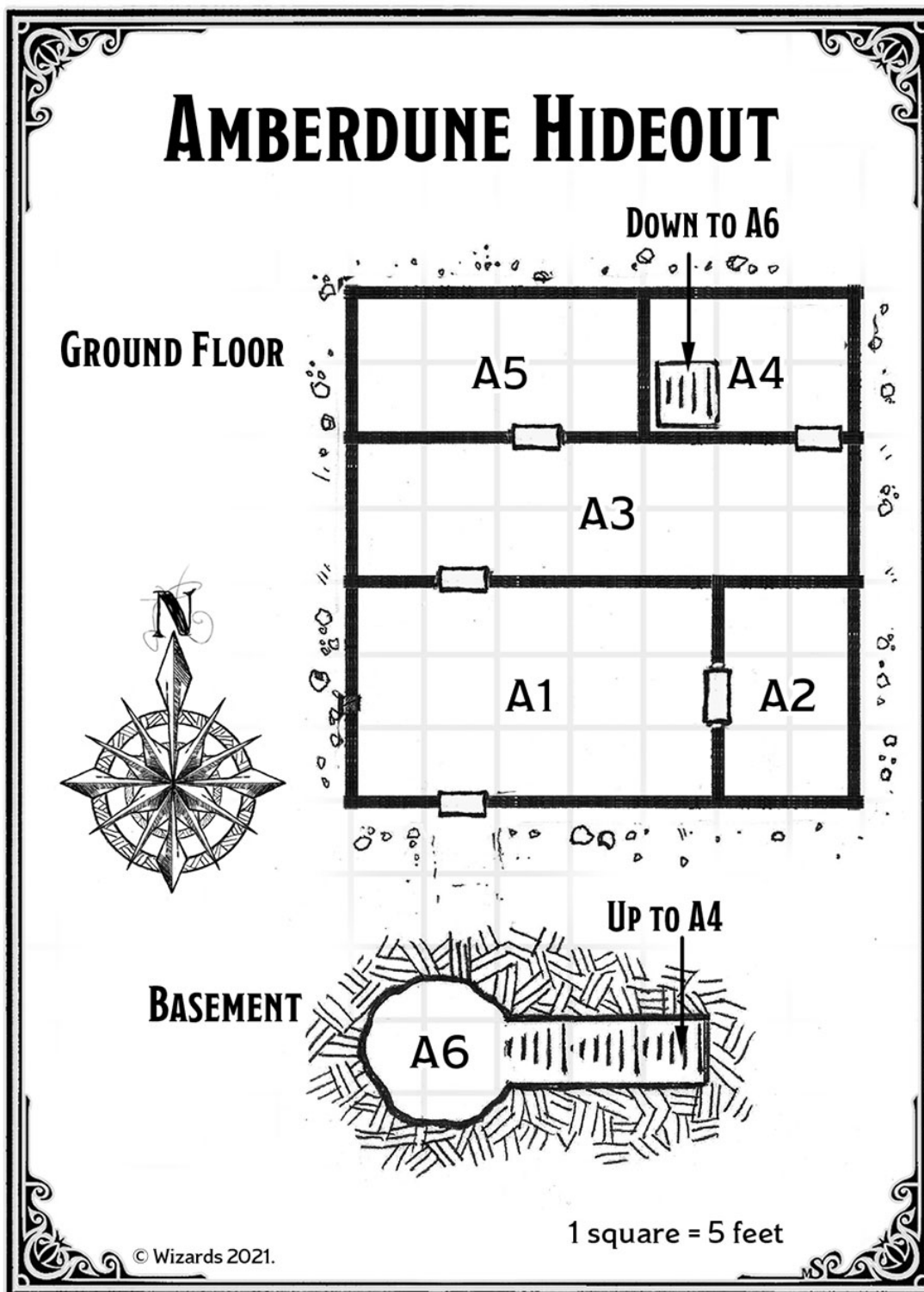
MAZFROTH'S MIGHTY DIGRESSIONS

In this adventure for 2nd level characters, a monstrous revelation sheds light on a book merchant's scam. Written by Alison Huang, you can [read our interview](#) with her from the previous issue.



The adventure itself centers on a collection of essays called *Mazfroth's Mighty Digressions*, delivered to Candlekeep only a few days ago. It was donated by a scholar from Waterdeep who purchased the journal in the markets of Baldur's Gate. Seven inches wide and nine inches tall, the book's brown leather cover is worn from time and use and contain a collection of eclectic essays.

Unbeknownst to the characters, the book is... perhaps a little more than it seems (we'll save the full extent of that mystery for now).



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***Candlekeep Mysteries* is available now at your local game store, bookstores such as **Barnes & Noble**, **Books-a-Million**, or online at retailers such as **Amazon**. A digital version is also available at **D&D Beyond**, **Fantasy Grounds**, and **Roll20**.**

CARTOGRAPHERS

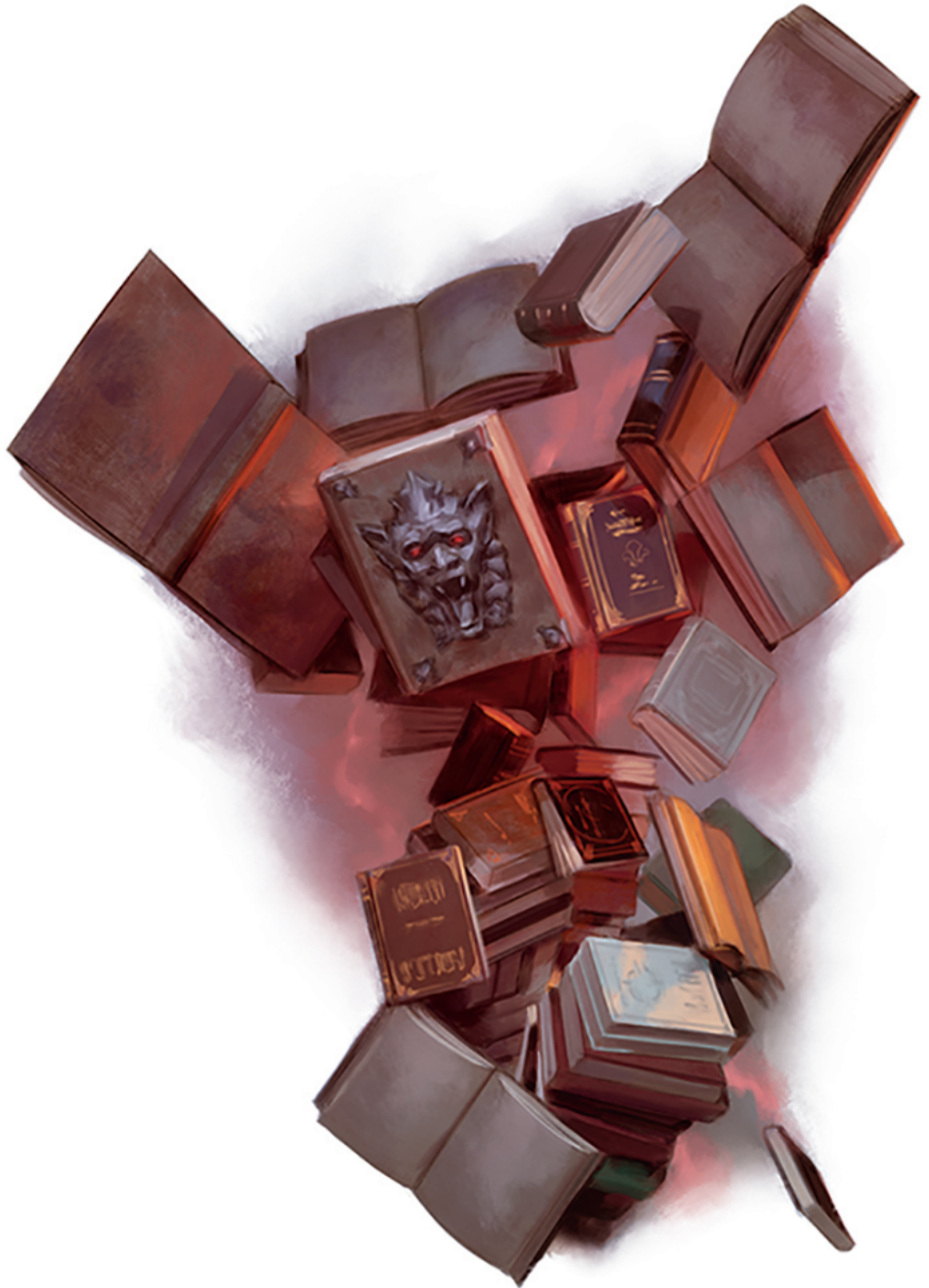
As always, our appreciation goes out to our amazing cartographers for *Candlekeep Mysteries*, including Tim Hartin, Dyson Logos, Sean Macdonald, and Mike Schley; as well as its illustrators including Mark Behm, Zoltan Boros, Filip Burburan, Christopher Burdett, Sidharth Chaturvedi, Clint Cearley, Nikki Dawes, Wayne England, Caroline Gariba, Sam Keiser, Julian Kok, Katerina Ladon, Andrew Mar, Simen Meyer, Irina Nordsol, Robin Olausson, Claudio Pozas, April Prime, Domenico Sellaro, Ernanda Souza, Brian Valeza, Tyler Walpole, Zuzanna Wuzyk, and Kieran Yanner.

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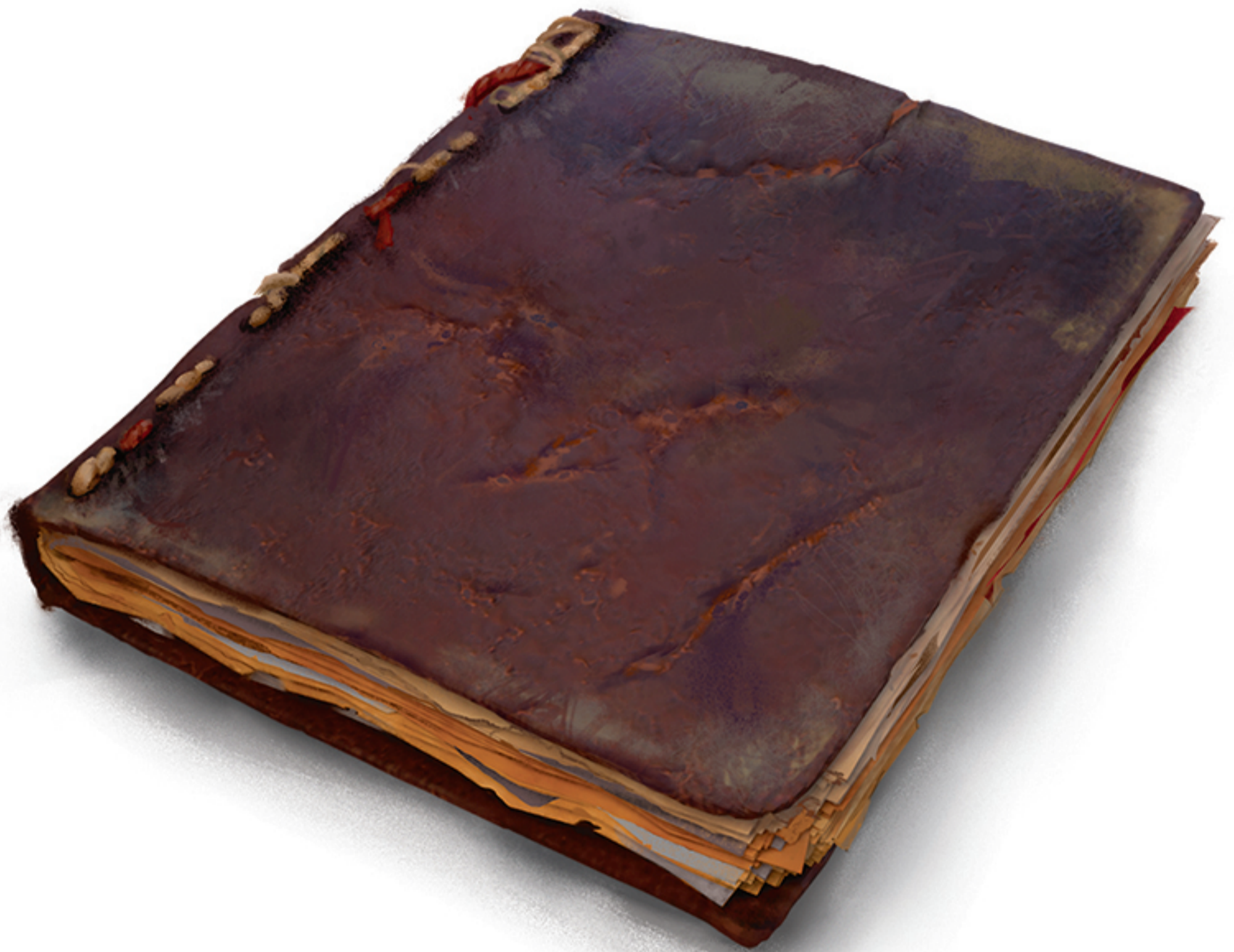
























Character Spotlight: NPCs

An undead order of shadow monks is here to destroy—or save!—the world.

Dragon+ #36 included a **major new collaborative series** bringing together the talents of artist Max Dunbar and writer/editor

Adam Lee. The pair fused so perfectly together we're pretty sure they're **super saiyans**, with the words informing the images and the images informing the words.

When we first chatted about the characters they might create for that issue of *Dragon+*, their selection included a master potion maker, a specialist dwarf bounty hunter, and a vampire shadow monk. Grabitha Grindleclaw (a hag riding a cauldron) and Hieronymus Black (a member of The Fathomless) debuted in our previous issue, but the undead shadow monk was replaced by monster hunter for hire Yahira Silverblade. Not because the shadow monk wasn't interesting enough. Quite the opposite—it was so good that it spawned a whole scenario of its own, with some additional characters thrown in for good measure.

Continued on next page...

[DOWNLOAD Feast of the Nightwalker](#)



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FEAST OF THE NIGHTWALKER

High up on a deserted altiplano lies a monastery dedicated to the study of the Negative Plane of existence. Residing in the monastery are a group of monks, all of whom have willingly entered into undeath so that they may eternally carry out their duty. Sigils of magical power—which were once used in ancient times to access the Negative Plane and bring forth a nightwalker to torment the world—have been etched into the mountain plateau. Knowledge of the monastery has slipped into myth and legend, with only a few sages and scholars still aware of the scattered tales of its nefarious past.

The question is, who are the monks that dwell in the monastery now? Are they noble guardians of a horrifying secret that must not see the light of day? Or are they evildoers waiting to wield the monastery's terrible power once again?

HISTORY OF THE MONASTERY

Eons ago, Urd, a lich monarch of the Negative Plane, left his crumbling tower and wormed his way onto the Material Plane. His plan was to bring forth a terrible entity known as a nightwalker and wreak havoc on the living. The lich had in his possession an ancient chart of planar motions, which foretold of a cosmic cycle that would bring the Negative Plane, the Shadowfell, and the Material Plane into alignment. From this chart, he knew the time and place where a bridge could be created, and a nightwalker could be summoned.

With the help of his undead minions, the lich built a monastery on a desolate altiplano within the Material Plane. There, he interred his library of arcane knowledge, known as the *Litany of Urd*, etching powerful sigils of necrotic magic into the surrounding earth and rock. This turned the area itself into a potent magical nexus that called to the nightwalker. The monastery became an omphalos, designed to observe celestial patterns and provide the exact time when the bridge from the Negative Plane could be made manifest.

The lich lord was successful. The planes aligned and a nightwalker crossed the shadow bridge, lured by the energy of the living, to be unleashed on the material world. For an age, there was darkness and misery as the nightwalker brought pestilence, famine, and death to the region, but the forces of goodness gathered and struck back, banishing the nightwalker and hunting down the lich lord.

THE MONASTERY TODAY

Centuries have passed, and the nightwalker's reign of terror has slipped into myth. The monastery still stands, as it always has, on a remote mountain plateau observing the ceaseless movement of the stars. It is now cared for by an order of undead monks who call it the Monastery of Shadows. It serves as a stellar observatory and as a school for those interested in the necromantic arts. Within its walls, the monks decode and study the lich lord's ancient library—star charts that show the paths of the planes and manuscripts dedicated to dimensional travel and undeath. When possible, the monks use the monastery's power to transport themselves to the Negative Plane to try and find the lich's lair. They believe if they can unearth further knowledge and clues about the monastery's function, they might discover even greater secrets.

THE LITANY OF URD

Around the Monastery of Shadows, cryptic symbols are etched into the stone. Some of these symbols have been decoded by the monks, while others remain tantalizingly unintelligible. Using the texts they have deciphered, the monks have revealed the secrets of moving through shadows and summoning the nightwalker Malthraxis, who previously wrought chaos on the Material Plane. But there are many more secrets yet to be revealed. Perhaps the secret to controlling Malthraxis awaits discovery, or the symbols will predict the focus of Malthraxis' destruction once it arrives on the Material Plane. The *Litany of Urd* can contain anything a DM wishes it to, and it's a perfect way to kick off another adventure entirely or deepen the mystery of the Monastery of Shadows for many adventures to come.

TWO POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

In this adventure you can choose two possibilities:

- The monks are an evil cabal awaiting the moment the stars to align once again to use the monastery's power for evil.
- The monks are good, protecting the monastery from those who would use its power to summon the nightwalker once again.

SCENARIO 1: CHOOSING EVIL

In this scenario, the monks are all in the service of evil and are waiting with deathless patience for the moment when the veil between the planes grows thin once again. When the time is right, they use the power of the monastery to punch a hole through to the Negative Plane and summon a nightwalker. But the monks need a sacrifice, a soul potent and vital enough to draw the nightwalker's attention. This could be an NPC from a nearby city, town, or village; a sacred creature such as a unicorn, couatl, or ki-rin; an object with a soul trapped in it; or it could be one of the PCs.

Defeating the Evil. If the party is on the weaker side, and the nightwalker is summoned, then it should feel like a catastrophe and everyone should run for the hills. DMs can avoid a TPK (total party kill) by having the nightwalker soar down the starlit mountainside to the valley below to wreak necrotic havoc on a nearby city, giving the adventurers some time to figure out how to stop it. To avoid a disaster, the party must work fast to banish the monster.

Here are a few suggestions of how the nightwalker might be defeated without direct combat:

- Recover the sacrifice or object who was sent into the Negative Plane to summon the nightwalker. This requires that a PC or the party be protected from the annihilating energies of the Negative Plane before they go there (see "Surviving the Negative Plane" below).
- Lure the nightwalker back into the Negative Plane with some creature or object that has a powerful lifeforce.
- Create a MacGuffin (like a helm, necklace, or portal) that, if destroyed, banishes the nightwalker and severs the bridge to the Negative Plane. This MacGuffin is guarded by monsters and evil monks that the party has a chance of defeating.

SCENARIO 2: CHOOSING GOOD

In this scenario, the lich lord (see *History of the Monastery* above) has taken centuries to reform, and is now a tattered, shambling version of his former self, bent on revenge and desperate to get back to his tower on the Negative Plane. Depending on the level of your party, you can have them face a full powered **lich**, or you can use the **archmage** stat block and give it undead immunities and resistances. You can also use the **necromancer** stat block below to make it an undead creature for a very low-powered lich.

Zashtii (if you choose to use her) and some of the other monks in the monastery are among the original fighters who helped stop the lich and the nightwalker centuries ago. Not willing to entrust their task of protecting the monastery to anyone else, they took a vow of undeath that eternally bound them to the monastery and their duty.

When the adventure begins, the stellar alignment is drawing near. The lich lord and his shadow horde are closing in, ready to reclaim the monastery from the monks and either unleash the nightwalker once again to devour the living world or use the planar bridge to return to the lich's tower so he can fully reform. Knowing what they are about to face, Zashtii is eager to accept help from any friendly PCs willing to aid her in their stand against the lich lord.

Just for fun, here are a few other ideas for who the enemy could be:

- A **mummy lord** with a horde of undead minions who wishes to turn the monastery into a mausoleum and rule over the living.
- Deranged former **shadow monks** (see the *Order of Shadows* PDF in *Dragon+ #37*) wish to reclaim the Monastery of Shadows and summon the nightwalker to be worshipped as a god.
- A host of **shadow demons** led by a demonic necromancer (use the **necromancer** stat block below) wish to cause mayhem and destruction.

- A **vampire warrior**, a former member of the monastery who commands vampire spawn, believes that Zashtii should be ousted, and the nightwalker unleashed.

THE NEGATIVE PLANE

Also known as the Plane of Death, the Negative Plane is the source of necrotic energy that destroys the living and animates the undead. Any living thing that enters the plane is instantly torn apart and consumed. Only living beings with the most powerful magic can survive for a short time within its colorless desolation. But the Negative Plane isn't devoid of inhabitants—liches, nightwalkers, death knights, and swaths of undead reside in the swirling decay of its bleak landscape, ready to destroy any who intrude on their deathless vigil.

SURVIVING THE NEGATIVE PLANE

If a party must enter the Negative Plane to rescue a person or steal an object, they must be protected from its annihilating energies. This can be accomplished by a powerful magic item of your invention (such as a ring, potion, or amulet), or by a *wish* spell.

A fun situation to create is to have the party be on a timer. This ticking clock counts down the time before their protection fails and they are exposed to the Negative Plane's necrotic energy.

Another option is to limit the bubble of their protection. Have the magic ring only offer a 15-foot diameter sphere of protection that the whole party must cluster inside of. As the bearer of the protection moves, the party must move with them. Anyone moving out of that sphere takes 36 (8d8) necrotic damage per turn until they are back inside the bubble.

RAMPING IT UP

If you want to make this a higher-level challenge for your players (if they are tough enough to take on a nightwalker), then you can remove the magical MacGuffins that the adventurers can find and use to avoid dealing with the Negative Plane and the nightwalker. Without these aids, the adventurers must have their own magical means to figure out how to banish (or go toe-to-toe with) the nightwalker before it destroys hundreds of villagers in its necrotic rampage. You can always throw a lich into the mix if your adventurers are itching for a real challenge.

For a milder ramp up, doubling monster hit points, adding tougher minions, and giving an NPC a cool magic item (like a +3 sword or an Ioun stone) are among a host of other tricks you can use to increase the punch of your monsters and give your players a challenge.

MONSTERS

All monsters in **bold** have stat blocks that can be found in the *Monster Manual* with the exception of the necromancer, which is included below.

NECROMANCER

Necromancers are specialist wizards who study the interaction of life, death, and undeath. Some like to dig up corpses to create undead slaves. A few use their powers for good, hunting the undead and risking their lives to save others.

NECROMANCER

Medium humanoid (any race)

Armor Class 12 (15 with mage armor)

Hit Points 66 (12d8 + 12)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Int +7, Wis +5

Skills Arcana +7, History +7

Damage Resistances necrotic

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages any four languages

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +4

Spellcasting. The necromancer is a 12th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). The necromancer has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): chill touch, dancing lights, mage hand, mending

1st level (4 slots): false life, mage armor, ray of sickness

2nd level (3 slots): blindness/deafness, ray of enfeeblement, web

3rd level (3 slots): animate dead, bestow curse, vampiric touch

4th level (3 slots): blight, dimension door, stonework

5th level (2 slots): Bigby's hand, cloudkill

6th level (1 slot): circle of death.

Grim Harvest (1/Turn). When the necromancer kills a creature that is neither a construct nor undead with a spell of 1st level or higher, the necromancer regains hit points equal to twice the spell's level, or three times if it is a necromancy spell.

Actions

Multiattack. The monk makes two Shadow Blade attacks and one Censer attack.

Shadow Blade. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 5 (2d4) necrotic damage.

Character Spotlight: NPCs



The Order of Shadows

“**M**ax drew this awesome vampire monk, and once I saw her, she brought this whole story with her. We started chatting about how she could be part of a larger order of monks all dedicated to a purpose which required they become immortal. Thus, their grand master, a vampire, turned them all into vampires so that they could continue their ‘great work’ indefinitely as undead,” Adam remembers.

“This started us thinking about a common motif that runs through

their order. We felt that it would be best to hold the vampire monk back so that Max could work on these characters together and include that cool symbolism in their design. We could then create a package that includes the other monks, the history of the monastery, and the story of their purpose.”

Continued on next page...

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THE ORDER OF SHADOWS

The monks that watch over the Monastery of Shadows have undergone a ritual of undeath to become its eternal guardians. Each monk wields a unique weapon, a blade forged exclusively for them, which is imbued with necrotic energy and attached by a length of chain to a censer. The blade represents their new soul, which replaces the one sacrificed to the order. Both the blade and the censer serve as ritual objects in their religious ceremonies, but they are also effective and deadly weapons. The blade can inflict painful, festering wounds and the censer not only affects the mind with its intoxicating smoke, but can also lash out and crush bone.

ITEMS

There are many secrets within the Monastery of Shadows that the monks use to their advantage. Yet during their tireless pacing throughout the structure, it is their blade and censer that never leave their side.

SMOKE CENSER

The smoke from the censer that a monk uses is a special blend of olfactory allure and mind-altering substances. Being undead, neither are of any consequence or concern to the monks. But any living creature that inhales the censer's fumes has the possibility of being transported to a psychological dimension beyond normal understanding. Inhaling this smoke causes a variety of reactions—from confusion and terror to elation and euphoria. Some monks are known to interpret the reactions as cryptic messages from the Negative Plane.

SHADOW BLADE

A monk's shadow blade is a ritual object sacred to them. These blades are forged within the monastery using special ore mined on the plateau. Each blade is given a name and is chanted over while undergoing the annealing process that seals the monk's soul within it. Further incantations from the *Litany of Urd* imbue the blade with necromantic power that is activated when its name is spoken aloud. A cut from a shadow blade is no normal thing. Even though the wound knits, the chilling ache of it can linger on for months or years.



THE LITANY OF URD AND MALTHRAXIS

The monks are aware of the nightwalker, Malthrax, and its connection to the Monastery of Shadows. Whether the monks revere or revile Malthrax, they understand it is essentially a cosmic force to be respected and have found ways to protect themselves and their monastery should Malthrax desire their destruction.

By inscribing certain fragments of the Litany of Urd on their blades, they have created a potential way to banish Malthrax. If enough of the monks gather together and use their blades to chant the Litany of Urd, they can send Malthrax back through the portal. But this practice has never been tested and the monks hope that day never comes.

USING THE MONKS IN YOUR GAME

Although they are written here as an order of monks dedicated to a specific monastery and leader, a DM can use these shadowy, undead zealots in any way they wish. The monks might be led by a powerful necromancer, a mummy lord, or an elder god that speaks through an onyx sphere in a mountain temple. Here are a few ideas for how these monks can show up in your game:

RETURN OF THE MASTER

The monks have cowed a town into submission, and no one dare speak out against their edicts. Many of the townsfolk and even the mayor's own daughter has either been kidnapped or brainwashed and rumor has it that they are being prepared for some mass ritual of undeath to replenish their ranks.

As the adventurers get involved, there is an interesting turn of events. On meeting their foes, the monks rejoice. Apparently, they believe one of the adventurers is their reincarnated master who they have waited centuries for. They begin preparations at their monastery for an even bigger festival to prepare the PC to undergo the Ritual of Becoming—a process where the character's life force is bound into the body of a nightwalker—the greatest of honors among the shadow monks.

EXPEDITION INTO NIGHT

A powerful creature of undeath has captured a celestial being—such as a unicorn, couatl, or ki-rin—and has taken them into the Negative Plane of existence to undergo a foul ritual that drains their life force and leaves them a corrupt and twisted monstrosity. The characters are approached by a holy cleric who pleads with them to help return the creature to their order and back to the Celestial Realm from where they originated.

If they accept the quest, the holy cleric leads them to a death domain cleric, who then leads them to the Monastery of Shadows and its deathless host of

monks—experts of the Negative Plane. Although they are undead, the monks are not evil and are able to act as guides within the ghastly domain. The monks can provide information that can lead to a portal to the Negative Plane, and they might also provide a special potion that when consumed can withstand the life draining effects of the Negative Plane for 24 hours. One of them might also be persuaded to act as a guide. The monks know this undead creature and they are aware of the foul ritual that is about to take place.

SHADOW MONK

Medium undead

Armor Class 14

Hit Points 91 (14d8 + 28)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Int +5

Skills Perception +9, Stealth +12

Damage Vulnerabilities radiant

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 19

Languages understands the languages it knew in life but can't speak

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +4

Sunlight Weakness. While in sunlight, the monk has disadvantage on attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws.

Shadow Stealth. While in dim light or darkness, the monk can take the Hide action as a bonus action.

Ritual Smoke. Any creature within 10 feet of the shadow monk must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw to avoid inhaling the smoke. On a failed save, they are poisoned for 1d4 turns and see bewildering visions unless the condition can be removed. Creatures immune to the poisoned condition are immune to this mind-altering effect.

Actions

Multiattack. The monk makes two Shadow Blade attacks and one Censer attack.

Shadow Blade. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 14 (4d6) necrotic damage. Unless the target is immune to necrotic damage, the target's Strength score is reduced by 1d4 each time it is hit by this attack. The target dies if its Strength is reduced to 0. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a short or long rest. If a non-evil humanoid dies from this attack, a shadow (see the Monster Manual) rises from the corpse 1d4 hours later.

Censer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 14 (3d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Character Spotlight: NPCs



Zashtii

As the character of Zashtii was fleshed out, so was the Monastery of Shadows. She was one in a lineage of undead guardians who took the path to undeath willingly to serve the monastery for eternity. The question was, what prompted that choice? Was Zashtii waiting for something to happen or was she waiting to prevent something from happening, choosing to become undead to complete this task because it was so important?

“This caused a split in her story,” Adam reveals. “In one version, she was a baddie waiting to bring about something awful. And in the other version, she was a goodie who underwent undeath to make sure that this horrible event didn’t happen again. The next question was, what was so awful?”

Continued on next page...

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ZASHTII

Zashtii is a devout monk who became obsessed with harnessing the eldritch energies of the Negative Plane of existence. To give herself an eternity to grow in power, she underwent a ritual of undeath that turned her into a creature of shadow and smoke. The ritual bound her into a pair of magic bracers which allow her to solidify and control her form. But the bracers are vampiric and demand a steady feast of blood to keep Zashtii's form coherent and tangible and, depending on how long it is since she last fed, Zashtii can be more smoke than solid. When encountering Zashtii, some part of her always appears as if she is materializing within the smoke or being dematerialized by it—a terrifying reminder of her curse.

By entering undeath, Zashtii can now walk unharmed within the deathless wasteland of the Negative Plane. With no life force or living flesh to be pulled apart by its necrotic energies, she can wander its endless ruins and uncover its ancient secrets. As head of the Monastery of Shadows, she has plans to bring back long forgotten magic and arcane lore from the Negative Plane so that others who seek ultimate power can join her order and learn its mysteries.

ZASHTII'S GEAR

Over the centuries, Zashtii has discovered a few items of necromantic power in and around the Monastery of Shadows and on the Negative Plane of existence.

SHADOW BRACERS

Zashtii has a pair of metal bracers that end in steel clawed gloves. The bracers are etched with necromantic sigils that allow her to form a pair of smoky talons from her being. These talons can reach out and inflict necrotic wounds that sap the strength out of the living, which she then uses to hold her form together.

CYLINDERS OF URD

At the ends of her two long braids are a pair of metal cylinders that are inscribed with symbols of power—a fragment of a long lost manuscript called the *Litany of Urd*. Once attuned to these cylinders, the wearer can “shadow jump”, disappearing in one shadowy place and appearing instantly in another.

USING ZASHTII IN YOUR GAME

Zashtii can function as a villain or as an unlikely ally for an adventuring party. She can also provide access to the Negative Plane of existence and any kind of necromantic lore that the party might need. Here are some ideas on how to use Zashtii in your game to get your creativity flowing:



THE ROYAL BLOOD

A prince or princess has become involved in an order known as the Monastery of Shadows. The adventurers are hired by the ruling monarch to find them and bring them back to their family. The monarch is offering a great reward.

Zashtii could be using the influence of the younger royal, who is a willing convert to the order, to grow her ranks and overthrow the kingdom from within. Or she could simply be preparing the royal for sacrifice to summon a nightwalker and unleash mayhem on the realm. Blood from this royal lineage has mythic power.

A WALK IN THE DARK

The adventurers must venture into the Negative Plane of existence to get something for their benefactor. It could be an artifact or the body of someone important. Despite a lot of research, the benefactor only has vague clues about a monastery hidden in the mountains that is rumored to house an order of undead monks. They are to go there and see if they can enlist their aid in getting to the Negative Plane.

Zashtii has an item that can protect a party from the effects of the Negative Plane, but she will bargain with them for its use. There might also be something on the Negative Plane that she desires. Perhaps an item of power locked inside a vault that only a person with a soul can enter.

ZASHTII

Medium undead

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 112 (15d8 + 45)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	18 (+4)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +9, Wis +8, Cha +9

Skills Perception +8, Stealth +9

Damage Resistances necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 18

Languages Common

Challenge 13 (10,000 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +5 **Legendary Resistance (3/Day)**. If Zashtii fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Spider Climb. Zashtii can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Shadow Jump. As a bonus action, Zashtii can teleport up to 30 feet to an unoccupied space she can see. Both the space she teleports from and the space she teleports to must be in dim light or darkness. Zashtii can use this ability between the weapon attacks of another action she takes.

Actions

Multiattack. Zashtii makes two attacks, only one of which can be a bite attack.

Steel Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 13 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage 7 (2d6) necrotic damage. Instead of dealing damage, Zashtii can grapple the target (escape DC 18).

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature, or a creature that is grappled by Zashtii, incapacitated, or restrained. Hit: 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage

plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and Zashtii regains hit points equal to that amount. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

Smoke Talons. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 15 ft., one creature. Hit: 14 (3d6 + 4) necrotic damage, and the target's Strength score is reduced by 1d4. The target dies if this reduces its Strength to 0. Otherwise, the reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest.

Charm. Zashtii targets one humanoid she can see within 30 feet of her. If the target can see Zashtii, the target must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw against this magic or be charmed by Zashtii. The charmed target regards Zashtii as a trusted friend to be heeded and protected. Although the target isn't under Zashtii's control, it takes Zashtii's requests or actions in the most favorable way it can, and it is a willing target for Zashtii's bite attack.

Each time Zashtii or her companions do anything harmful to the target, it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on itself on a success. Otherwise, the effect lasts 24 hours or until Zashtii is destroyed, is on a different plane of existence than the target, or takes a bonus action to end the effect.

Reactions

Deflect Missile. In response to being hit by a ranged weapon attack, Zashtii deflects the missile. The damage she takes from the attack is reduced by 1d10 + 14. If the damage is reduced to 0, Zashtii catches the missile if it's small enough to hold in one hand and she has a hand free. If she doesn't have a hand free, the smoke entity which surrounds her catches the missile for her.

Legendary Actions

Zashtii can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Zashtii regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Quick Step. Zashtii moves up to her speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Attack. Zashtii makes one attack with her steel claw.

Attack (Costs 2 Actions). Zashtii makes one bite attack or one attack with her smoke talons.

Character Spotlight: NPCs



Malthrax

Max answered that question by suggesting a nightwalker as a central character in the story of the undead shadow monks. Such a powerful creature would create a high-level threat in any world. At *Dragon+* HQ, he's become known as "Big M".



“Not only would Malthraxis be super awesome to draw, he seemed like a big enough bad guy to cause the shadow monastery and its undead order to be created. I started to think about how this whole thing started, and thus was born this latest group of NPCs and the adventure hook we’re calling *Feast of the Nightwalker*,” Adam says.

[DOWNLOAD Malthraxis](#)

Check out Adam and Max's *first collaboration for *Dragon+, which includes bounty hunter Hieronymus Black, monster hunter Yahira Silverblade, and potion specialist Grabitha Grindleclaw.**

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MALTHRAXIS

Malthrax is a nightwalker that is ancient beyond reckoning. It wanders within the dark wasteland of the Negative Plane of existence waiting for the moment when it can return to the Material Plane and feast on the raw nectar of the living. Malthrax is covered with arcane sigils carved into its body by some long forgotten archmagus. The sigils not only give Malthrax power, but they also contain long lost secrets of necromancy—no doubt put there to be guarded by the nightwalker.

SOUL TENDRILS

Unlike other nightwalkers, Malthrax has tendrils of thick smoke that endlessly cascade from its body. These are comprised of the souls it has devoured over the eons and they wail or laugh maniacally as they dissipate and dissolve into the air. Malthrax can lash out with this smoke to entangle its prey and drag them into its annihilating aura.

THE LITANY OF URD

The hide of Malthrax is etched with arcane symbols and glyphs known as the *Litany of Urd*. Translating these glyphs reveals necromantic secrets that are of great value to scholars, necromancers, and those who covet powerful magic. Comprehending the *Litany of Urd* requires intense study, a grasp of many languages, and a vast intellect, but it could reveal mysteries such as: the key to lichdom, how to kill a demigod, how to become a demigod, and other arcane secrets. It could also include ways to summon or banish a creature such as Malthrax and other powerful undead.

USING MALTHRAXIS IN YOUR GAME

Malthrax is either an apocalyptic threat for lower-level parties or a dangerous foe for high-level parties.

DECODING THE SIGILS

For a high-level adventure, the party is approached by wealthy patron who claims to have found a scroll that tells the story of a nightwalker named Malthrax. The scroll was written by an ancient archmage who claims to have etched a lifetime of their secrets into Malthrax's hide for safe keeping as few would dare to try and take down a nightwalker. The scholar believes that it's possible that some of these etchings could be the secret to controlling Malthrax, while the writings might also contain a missing chapter from the legendary *Book of Vile Darkness* known as the *Litany of Urd*—whether the patron reveals this to the party is up to the DM. The patron desires access to the sigils (however the party might arrange that) and is willing to pay handsomely for it. The patron could be a necromancer, archmage,



or a historian who represents a famous and well-funded museum or library.

How the party finds Malthrax is up to the DM. They could go to the Monastery of Shadows and have the monks transport the party onto the Negative Plane. The patron's scroll may even contain a rough map of where Malthrax's lair is situated on the Negative Plane.

TIME BOMB

If you have a low-level party, then the threat of having Malthrax summoned to the Material Plane is a major problem requiring all hands on deck. Having a town be the target of Malthrax is a great challenge to throw at your players and will test their creative thinking. Do they alert the townsfolk and risk panic? Do they keep the danger a secret and hope they can stop the nightwalker's arrival? Do they try to defeat Malthrax in a *Seven Samurai*-style standoff? Or do they try to find some arcane solution to banish the horror? Perhaps an order of doom cultists gets a whiff of this threat and emerges from the woodwork to cause mayhem?

Having a very overpowered enemy begs for a non-combat solution, and this can be an opportunity to

let the cleric, wizard, or warlock shine as they work in libraries and temple sanctums to uncover clues. What they discover may either prevent the coming of Malthraxix or banish the nightwalker once it arrives. They also might work with a ranger to rig an arcane trap that imprisons it like an ordinary beast but has the extra added magic of the wizard to make sure it doesn't escape.

With a "ticking time bomb" plot—the explosion being the arrival of Malthraxix—it's fun to place hurdles in front of the characters to get the pot boiling. Perhaps the magic item they need to retrieve is hundreds of miles away or maybe the wizard they need to talk to is long since dead and her tomb is unknown. Adding problems that must be solved while the clock ticks down and the lives of innocents hang in the balance makes for gripping roleplaying.

HIGHER LEVELS

With higher-level characters, an encounter with Malthraxix presents some interesting choices. Giving the players an opportunity to take a major risk as they seek to be heroes is always a fun option to have on the table. Be sure to offer a lower-risk path but if a party wants to push all the chips in and gamble, give them a way to do it. In the case of dealing with a threat like Malthraxix, they could be presented with a way to travel to the Negative Plane and hunt the nightwalker there—keeping innocents on the Material Plane from ever having to face such a monster.

Making powerful characters care deeply about less-powerful NPCs also builds vulnerabilities into a party, which can be used to create drama and tension. There's no better mechanism than to put an innocent gnome village; an orphanage; or a kindly, halfling baker in the path of a nightwalker to stir the emotions of your party of superheroes and draw them away from their original plan and into deeper and more dangerous waters.

LOWER LEVELS

For a lower-level party, defeating Malthraxix is a daunting if not impossible task. One potential option may be the cooperation or coercion of the Order of Shadows, and the applied use of their shadow blades (see the *Litany of Urd* and Malthraxix text in the Order

of Shadows document in *Dragon+ #37*). Another might be the investigation of symbols that seem to relate to Malthraxix carved throughout the monastery (see The Litany of Urd section of this document). With some deciphering, these symbols could contain the answer to banishing or controlling the nightwalker.

MALTHRAXIS

Huge undead

Armor Class 14

Hit Points 297 (22d12 + 154)

Speed 40 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	19 (+4)	24 (+7)	6 (-2)	9 (-1)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Con +13

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages -

Challenge 20 (25,000 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +6

Annihilating Aura. Any creature that starts its turn within 30 feet of Malthraxix must succeed on a DC 21 Constitution saving throw or take 14 (4d6) necrotic damage and grant Malthraxix advantage on attack rolls against it until the start of Malthraxix' next turn. Undead are immune to this aura.

Life Eater. A creature reduced to 0 hit points from damage dealt by Malthraxix dies and can't be revived by any means short of a wish spell.

Actions

Multiaction. Malthraxix uses *Energating Focus* twice, or it uses *Energating Focus* and *Soul Tendrils*, if available, or it uses *Energating Focus* and *Finger of Doom*, if available.

Energating Focus. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. Hit: 28 (5d8 + 6) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 21 Constitution saving throw or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest.

Finger of Doom (Recharge 6). Malthraxix points at one creature it can see within 300 feet of it. The target must succeed on a DC 21 Wisdom saving throw or take 26 (4d12) necrotic damage and become frightened until the end of Malthraxix's next turn. While frightened in this way, the creature is also paralyzed. If a target's saving throw is successful, the target is immune to Malthraxix's *Finger of Doom* for the next 24 hours.

Soul Tendrils. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 60 ft., one target. Hit: 17 (2d10 + 6) slashing damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it is grappled (escape DC 23), pulled into an unoccupied space within 5 feet of Malthraxix, and must succeed on a DC 23 Intelligence saving throw or be stunned until this grapple ends. Malthraxix can't use its *soul tendrils* on another target until this grapple ends.

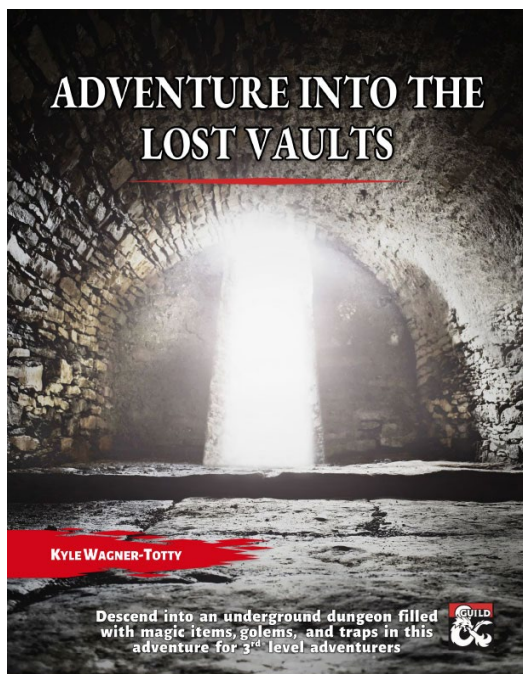
The Best of the Dungeon Masters Guild

This issue we embrace the mystery in our roundup of DMs Guild content and get adventure writing tips from the Storytelling Collective.



In celebration of *Candlekeep Mysteries*, we've trawled the DMs Guild to find content that compliments both aspects of that book's title. As well as presenting the most enjoyably puzzling adventures, we've also used the Dewey Decimal system to track down some inspiring collections for bibliophiles. And check out this issue's Community Poll for more unusual books dreamt up by *Dragon+* readers.

Adventure into The Lost Vaults,
by Kyle Wagner-Totty



Price: \$3.95 (PDF)

A group of workers sent to a large underground, ever-shifting vault hasn't returned. You've been hired by the kenku wizard who discovered the vault to find out why, in an adventure that can be played as a one-shot or across multiple sessions. Modular maps help create a variable dungeon system.

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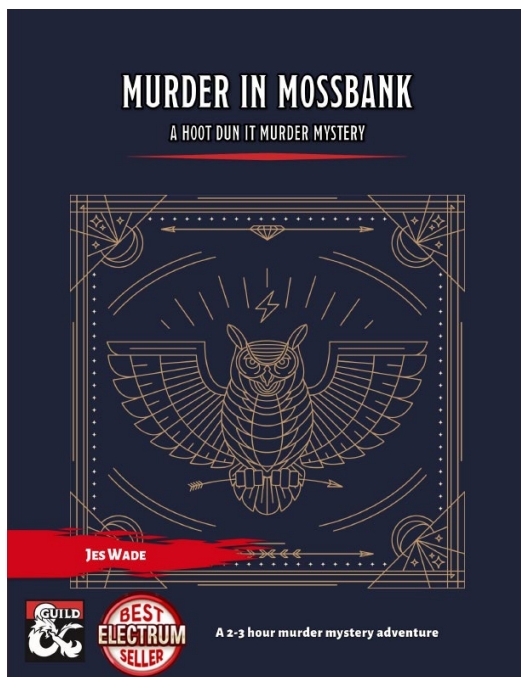
A Night of Fright!, by Steven Pankotai, and Sadie Lowry
Price: \$4.99 (PDF)

Zoinks! Has someone taken a fave kids' TV show featuring a cowardly dog and some teen sleuths and made a parody of it? You can be one of those "meddling kids" in this loving send-up of classic mystery cartoons, as four heroes and their (playable) talking gnoll explore a haunted mansion.

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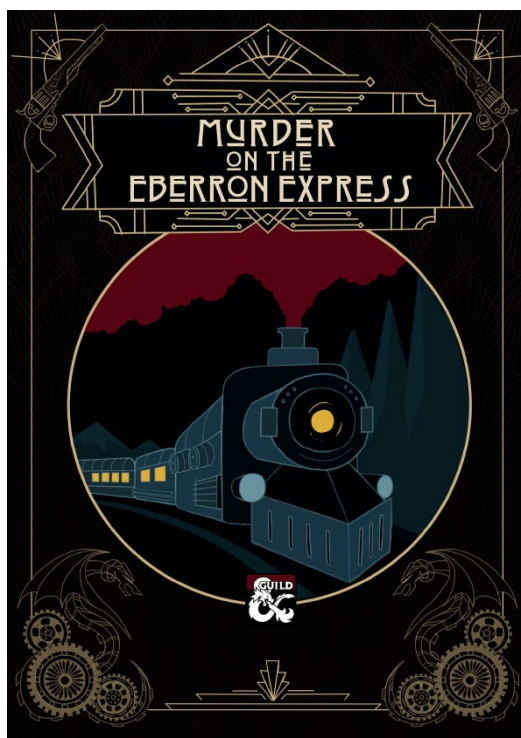
Murder in Mossbank, by Jes Wade
Price: \$1.49 (PDF)

The funeral of Sylviel, a beloved member of the Mossbank



community, has been held but the mystery of who killed her still hangs over the townsfolk. The mayor has 150 GP that says you're the right party to solve this crime and wants you to get to work piecing the clues together (cash on murderer delivery). Grab a PDF copy below, free for the life of this issue!

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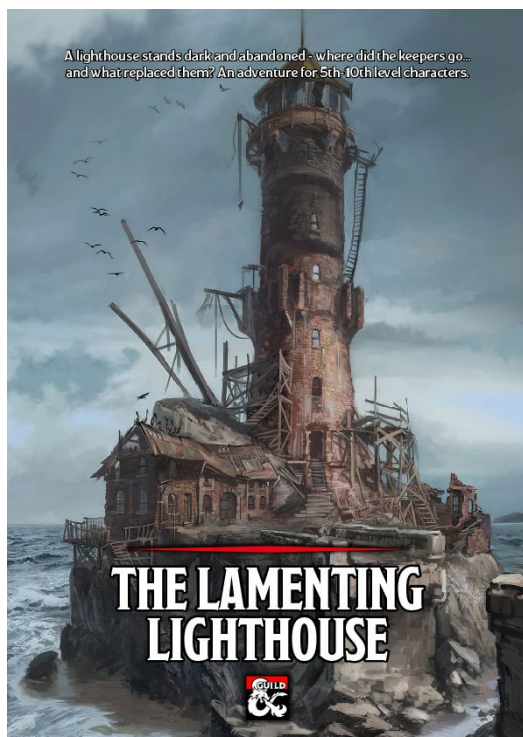


Murder on the Eberron Express,
by Orla ni Dhuill
Price: \$6.95 (PDF)

This character-driven murder mystery, where the cast is confined on a moving lightning rail, borrows from Agatha Christie's similarly named novel. The replayability of *Murder on the Eberron Express* comes from the game mechanic that one of the players might be the murderer, with the culprit changing each time you run it.

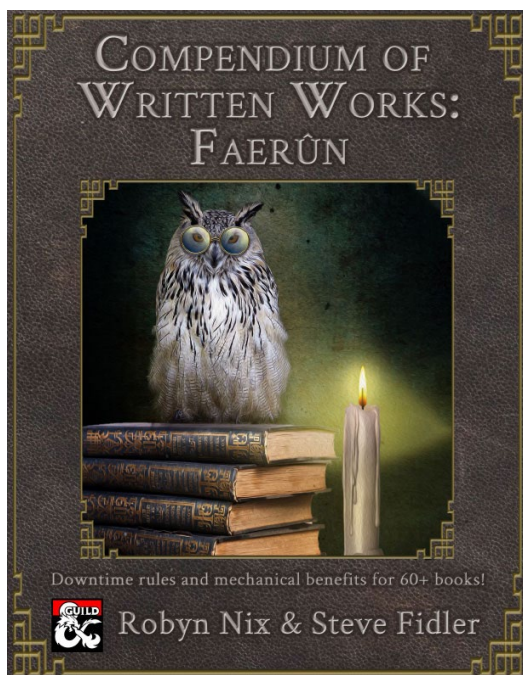
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The Lamenting Lighthouse, by
Sven Truckenbrodt
Price: \$4.95 (PDF)



Whether you're running a party through *Ghosts of Saltmarsh* or need a nautical interlude when your characters take to the sea, this four-hour adventure for 5th to 10th level characters can drop in seamlessly. Boasting horror elements (including original creatures such as the dread wight) and mysteries to solve, what dark secret does the lonely lighthouse hold?

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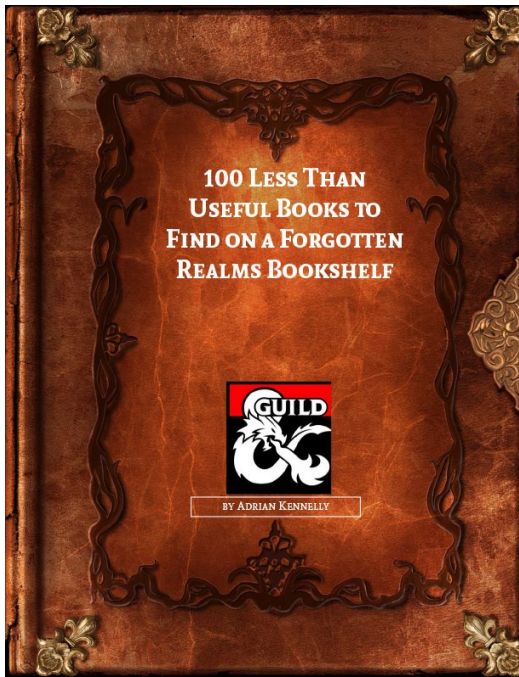


The Compendium of Written Works: Faerûn, by Robyn Nix, Steve Fidler, Ashton Duncan, and Lydia Van Hoy
Price: \$9.95 (PDF)

This compendium is a treasure chest of options for Dungeon Masters who want to reward their knowledge-seeking players. Featuring guidance for character downtime and over sixty books or other written works to pillage, it's perfect to satisfy characters looking to gobble up every piece of in-game knowledge they can.

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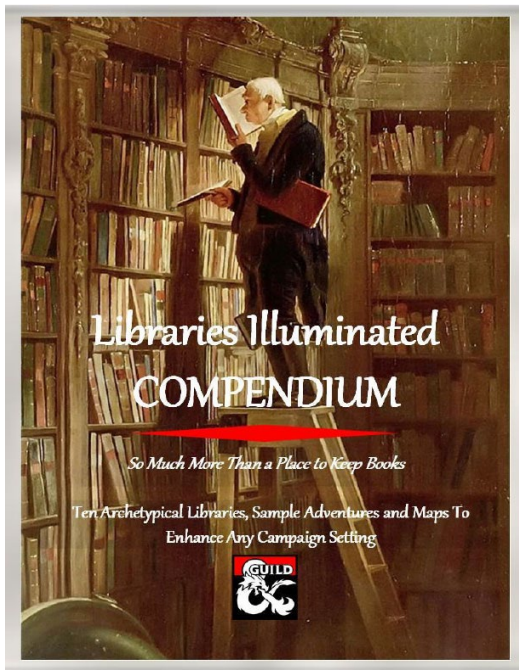
100 Less Than Useful Books to



Find on a Forgotten Realms Bookshelf, by Adrian Kennelly
Price: \$1.25 (PDF)

It's the occasionally unreliable and naïve nature of some of the works in this supposedly scholarly list that makes them fun. Clever DMs will be able to turn their succinct ideas into the opening threads of an adventure. The tomes here are unique and any might be used to pay your way into Candlekeep.

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Libraries Illuminated Compendium, by Peter Charron
Price: \$9.75 (PDF)

Peter Charron isn't happy that libraries take such a passive role in many adventures and has set about trying to elevate them from simple bookstores into places that enhance any campaign setting. His compendium proves that libraries can vary dramatically depending on their type, being centers of learning, statements of political power, and repositories of new and ancient secrets.

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Download Murder in Mossbank for free!

The party arrives in town after the funeral of a beloved local

figure has been held and Mayor Amos Dapremont immediately hires them to investigate her murder. Who killed Sylviel? Was it Head of the City Watch Horace, suspicious out-of-towner Norman, shady thugs Buster and Ralph, Sylviel's mom Bernadette or the Mayor himself?

Dragon+ is offering you the chance to download the PDF version of *Murder in Mossbank*, by clicking the link below. It will remain free for the life of this issue. Enjoy!

[DOWNLOAD THE FREE PDF](#)

Q&A: THE STORYTELLING COLLECTIVE



Director Ashley Warren and Community Manager Jack Kiser introduce *Dragon+* to an online training ground for aspiring DMs Guild authors. The Storytelling Collective help creatives to structure their activities, while fostering a nurturing atmosphere within the community.

How did the Storytelling Collective start?

Ashley Warren: The Storytelling Collective was founded in 2018 and was originally called the RPG Writer Workshop. At the time, I had been publishing frequently on the DMs Guild and thought the community could benefit from a learning program to help folks get started. I used to teach college English and did my graduate work in literacy studies, so I come from a background that combines writing, research, and education. Using that to help my fellow creators seemed like the natural next step.

The very first Workshop in July 2018 was simply an email series I had designed for a small group of people, but about 500 people signed up for it. At that point, it was clear that a more substantial

program and curriculum would be helpful. Since then, we've run our flagship program, the Write Your First Adventure course, every July and November, and have also expanded our course catalog to include other programs relevant to not just adventure writing, but immersive and interactive storytelling as well.

What was its original goal?

Ashley Warren: The goal was, and still is, to provide an approachable starting point for writers who wanted to write, produce, and publish their first adventures and hopefully start to build a creative career. I know that when I was starting out, I learned a lot of lessons the hard way! We focus a lot on building a creative process that works for each person by providing them with a sample process that has worked for our instructors. But the end goal is always for writers to take what they liked from the process, reflect on what they didn't like, and then cultivate their own process that gets them from ideation to completion for every creative idea. Personally, I'm not a believer in telling people to, "Just start!" a new creative endeavor; someone once gave me that advice when I was learning how to knit and I found it unhelpful. Research shows that creatives do well with some structure and that's what helps unlock true creativity, so we try to provide a framework for writers to build their ideas upon. And, ultimately, we're here to be cheerleaders: writing and creative work can be lonely, so we work hard to foster a supportive community where people feel welcome and empowered to create.

Jack Kiser: We want to help anyone find a voice and create a space for themselves in the D&D creator community.

How did you choose the team?

Ashley Warren: Our team is composed of myself, community manager Jack Kiser, and Hannah Renea Bumgarner—whom we refer to as our party support class. We're always busy; it's not easy managing a program this size with just three people when we all have day jobs! I feel very fortunate to be working on this project alongside them. Jack and I have been good friends for a few years and when he offered to help, I instantly said, "YES please!" He's been a part of the program since fall 2019. HR joined us last fall.

We also work with instructors who help us build out our program curriculum. Typically, we reach out to instructors who have expertise

in a specific topic or stage in the adventure writing process. We care far less about formal credentials and more about: does this person create cool work? Are they a supportive member of the community? We try to also invite new creators to be instructors, as teaching is a great way to hone a creative skillset. Everything we do is a group endeavor!

What success have you had?

Ashley Warren: Success for us takes many forms. The most important metric for us is that our writers had fun and learned something. We've had almost 10,000 people go through our programs over the past three years, and hundreds of those writers have published at least one adventure. Most go on to continue writing and publishing. We certainly have many notable alumni: Makenzie De Armas, **Alison Huang**, Sadie Lowry, Amber Litke, the Gallant Goblin team, and so many more. Their success is fully their achievement, but hopefully the community provided a positive jumping-off point.

How do you foster a supportive community? And is that made easier by social media?

Ashley Warren: There are certainly challenges and advantages to having an online community. We're able to bring folks together from around the world, which would be harder to do in person. Since conventions and events are on hold for the time being, not getting to hang out with our writers in person has been the biggest downside! Ultimately, we try to take a proactive role in inviting people to participate. Fostering community is an action; it's not enough to simply wait for people to come to you, you have to reach out and empower people. Writing and creative work can be vulnerable, so we try to establish expectations that our purpose as a community, first and foremost, is to offer support and encouragement.

Jack Kiser: Working as the Creator Relations Representative for the DMs Guild I always encourage authors to reach out to other creators in the community to build relationships and ask for help from their peers. I can only tell them if their title is within the guidelines of the platform, not if it is good, but our community loves to read the work of new creatives and give suggestions. The Discord server for the RPG Writer Workshop includes channels that cover promotion, troubleshooting, collaborations, and even motivation, and there are a

lot of active members willing to jump up and help whenever they can.

Who's the typical student for your courses? Or is there no such thing?

Ashley Warren: We don't have a typical student per se, but I'd say that the people in our community share a passion for innovative, immersive storytelling. Our students want creative work to be meaningful and sustainable. And, of course, we're all a bunch of geeks who enjoy delving into the stories we love and sharing why we love them.

You host free #StoCo Challenges throughout the year. How did they come about and what are the benefits for the creatives taking part in them?

Ashley Warren: We believe that creatives benefit from having some sort of structure, so our creative challenges are part of that. They function as "creative resets"; hop into a free challenge for a month and make some content based on the prompts we've mapped out. It's a fun and no-pressure way to generate some writing and try a new medium. Working on your own writing independently alongside other creatives working on their writing is very exciting and motivating because you get the benefits of a community while also making progress on your personal goals. This year, our creative challenges are about flash fiction, poetry, journaling, and short stories—these branch out of the TTRPG space, which we think is a good thing, because writers can flex their creative muscles in new ways and have fun in the process.

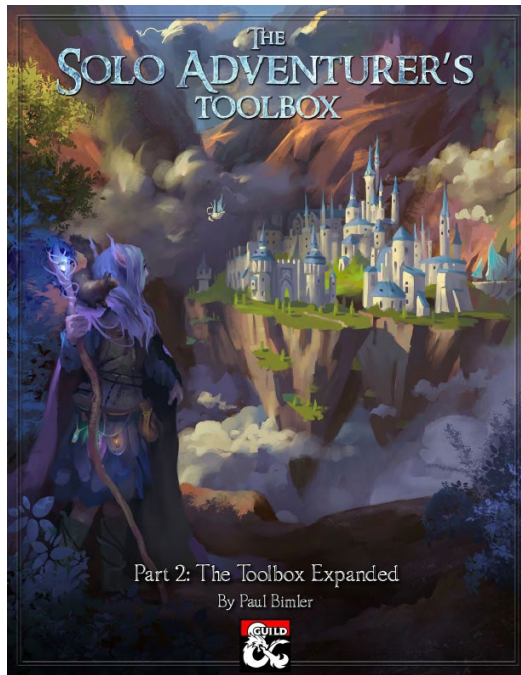
Do you help promote the work your students and former students create?

Ashley Warren: We absolutely do! After each of our Write Your First Adventure workshops, we assemble adventure bundles that can be found on the DMs Guild and DriveThruRPG. We work closely with those platforms to promote student work, and we also share content on our social media platforms and our email newsletter. It's a never-ending process; once someone is a part of our community, we always do our best to bring attention and support to their work. That's very important to our team and our instructors. Additionally, we're assembling anthologies of work produced during this year's creative challenges. Our hope is that being a part of a published project excites our writers and inspires them to continue creating.

You're branching out to include other mediums in 2021, including podcasting and live streams/interviews. What can people expect from those new elements?

Ashley Warren: As part of our rebranding in January, we want storytelling to be treated holistically, rather than operating in separate industries and silos. Our goal is to continue developing programming that touches on different types of storytelling, and we also want to offer resources using multimedia. We have some fun interviews and programs coming up this year, so stay tuned!

You can find out more about the Storytelling Collective and sign up for courses at its [official website](#).



SOLO ADVENTURER'S TOOLBOX: PART TWO

We interviewed [Paul Bimler in *Dragon+* #32](#) as part of our in-depth look at the best single-player tools and scenarios for D&D. And we followed that up with a [free solo adventure](#) written by Paul, set in the frozen wastes of Icewind Dale. Paul is known for writing *The Solo Adventurer's*

Toolbox and he's added a companion to that work in the form of *The Solo Adventurer's Toolbox Part Two: The Toolbox Expanded*.

Already achieving #1 bestseller status on the DMs Guild ("Which I'm pretty chuffed about," he tells *Dragon+*), it builds on the previous release, providing a wealth of extra tables, generators, new random non-combat encounters, solo play systems, and many other resources. It costs \$14.99 and the PDFs include parchment and print-friendly versions.

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

DESIGN THOUGHT: CREATING A MYSTERY

Even experienced Dungeon Masters can come unstuck when it comes to writing and running a mystery. What happens when your players ignore a glaring clue? What happens when they focus on an entirely random piece of information as if it's a key piece of evidence? And what happens when they step entirely out of the sandbox you've created and ignore the plot altogether? All of those possible points of failure can lead DMs to shy away from running mystery adventures in Dungeons & Dragons.

To skirt around the problem of poor dice rolls leading to undiscovered clues, you can instead have clues that are automatically discovered at each crime scene. After all, the trick isn't in finding the clue itself, it's in figuring out what that clue means to the investigation. However, a more natural way of pushing the mystery story forward is to use the "Three Clue Rule", which states: For any conclusion you want the players to reach, include at least three clues.

In an ideal world, your players will find all three clues and that goes a long way to solidifying their suspicions into a motive for murder or further understanding of how the crime was committed. In a more realistic world, they'll only find one of those clues but that will still be enough for them to put the pieces together and come to the same conclusion.

"But one of my clues is so obvious they won't need to find anything else," we hear you say. Unfortunately, as the person creating the mystery, it's impossible to be objective about what is and isn't an obvious clue. You already know who stole the gems/killed the countess, so you instantly make that leap. Even if you feel the clue's obvious, it doesn't hurt to follow the Rule of Three and add two additional clues backing up the same train of thought. Trust us, you'll be thankful you did.

DMs GUILD SUPPORTS DUNGEON CON ONLINE!



The DMs Guild is excited to be sponsoring Dungeon Con Online alongside Goodman Games in May! This is your chance to play games with Dungeon Masters worldwide, sign up for events with celebrity DMs, playtest not-yet-released adventures, and submit your own fifth edition content! In between games you can watch seminars and live-streamed panels and peruse the artist alley. There's

even a dealers' hall where you can find the newest supplements for your home game! Click [here](#) to learn more.

BACK TO TOP

MURDER IN MOSSBANK

A HOOTDUNIT MURDER MYSTERY



A 2-3 hour murder mystery adventure

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I started playing D&D on a camping trip with some of my rugby team mates in July of 2019, later that month I tore my ACL and looked to D&D to take me on adventures when my legs could not. Since then I have started creating goofy and light-hearted one shots and supplements. You can find my prior releases [here](#).

For all things fun and D&D related, you can find me on twitter [@Jesthehuman](#) – you can also DM me any questions you may have.

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MURDER IN MOSSBANK

This mystery one shot is designed for three to four level 1st or 2nd-level characters. The setting is neutral and can feasibly be placed into your existing campaign.

BACKGROUND

The adventure begins when the adventurers wander into Mossbank two hours after the funeral of Sylviel; a beloved member of the community who is assumed to have been murdered three days ago. The party is offered 150 gp by the mayor to aid in solving her murder. Townsfolk are split on whodun it, and the party must work together to piece together clues; ultimately finding out that it was a frame job done out of spite.

OVERVIEW

The adventure's story is spread over 2 parts and takes approximately 2 to 3 hours to play. The adventure begins with a Call to Action.

- **Call to Action: Investigators for hire.** The characters find themselves being asked aid the town in solving Sylviel's murder.
- **Part 1: Investigating the town.** Many shops have closed down to mourn Sylviel's death, however some businesses remain open with helpful clues to help solve the murder.
- **Part 2: The showdown.** The party comes face to face with the "murderer."

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Just Hanging Around. The characters are browsing the few shops that are open when they are offered 150 gp to aid the town in solving Sylviel's murder.

Battle of the Barbarians. Perhaps the characters wanted to watch or join the ongoing Battle of the Barbarians.

Help Wanted. The characters heard about Sylviel's death and wanted to investigate.

JUST A NOTE

There is minimal combat in this adventure, but the characters should start fully rested. Feel free to change the experience/setting to fit the needs of your DM style and the needs of your party. Ensuring the characters know what time it is throughout the adventure is important, so they can end up at the inn on time. While there is minimal prep work required for this adventure, I recommend reading it all in advance at least once.

THE SUSPECTS

HORACE

Horace, the current elected Head of City Watch, is running for re-election unopposed (the election is next week) and has the safety Mossbank forefront in his mind. He thinks the recent murder of his wife is an attempt to stir up a coup to remove him from office by an old rival, Norman. (If he

can't keep his wife safe, how can he keep the town safe?) Horace thinks Norman will use Sylviel's death to announce his run for Head of City Watch, so he hired some ruffians to stalk Norman and scare him away from participating in the election.

Horace and Norman grew up childhood rivals. Horace got the last guard spot out of school that both he and Norman applied for. Norman always had a crush on Sylviel, but she ended up with Horace. Now that she is dead, Horace thinks Norman probably killed her in a jealous rage, but he doesn't have sufficient evidence. Horace is happy to take the characters to his house when his shift ends at 4 pm, if they're interested. A character who succeeds on a DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check notices that Horace's answers seem rehearsed. (He is running for an elected position after all.)

Personality. Horace likes to keep up appearances and frequently attends the town's events. He often takes a few moments to answer questions, as if he is rehearsing his answers, and he calls everyone "buddy." Horace can be hot headed and is firm with his judgement.

Appearance. Horace is an older human that always has five o'clock shadow. His grey eyes always look tired; he's not as fit as he once was.

NORMAN

Norman is not planning on running for the City Watch position. None of the townsfolk really know what Norman has been doing for a living or what he's been up to since he lost the guard position over thirty years ago. He lives a modest life outside of town and is kind but generally keeps to himself. Norman thinks Horace killed Sylviel because she was finally going to leave him for Norman. Horace must have found out and murdered her. As evidence, he has a love letter confirming she was planning on leaving Horace.

Norman is extremely upset about Sylviel's death and his grief often impairs his ability to articulate his thoughts. Since Sylviel's death, he has been seen brooding at the Humbuddy, which is unusual for Norman, he's usually only seen a few times a year to buy supplies. He gets the same order from Warner and Cassidy every other month, and then a pint at the Humbuddy before taking off. If the characters are friendly to Norman, he offers them directions to his house; he will refuse to leave the Humbuddy right away.

Personality. Norman has a reputation for being calm, cool, and collected. However, when the characters meet him, he seems to be on edge.

Appearance. Norman is a middle-aged elf. He wears his coiled graying hair in a low, messy bun, and also wears a dark blue cloak.

THE "MURDERER"

SYLVIEL

Sylviel faked her own death three days ago to frame Horace after years of being stuck in an unhappy and unending relationship. She met with Norman last week to let him know she was leaving Horace. She didn't tell Norman about plotting her own murder to make her death seem more genuine, thinking that no one would suspect him.

Sylviel is a shapeshifter, born of a doppelganger and a human mother. She never knew her father, as he was presumably only in town to create more shapeshifters. Sylviel led a normal human life and only started exhibiting strange behavior in her teen years. Sometimes, her eyes and hair seemed to change color throughout the day. Occasionally her peers could have sworn she looked slightly different the last time they saw her. She kept this a secret to all, even her mother. As she aged, she started conforming to a "normal life, but with Horace's busy schedule, she took advantage of her alone time to practice her shapeshifting skills (see appendix A for her stat block).

She is able to shift into anyone in town; she could have easily shifted into her mom or husband to "identify" her body at the morgue, or perhaps she shed the Sylviel skin and disguised a dead body as her own. *This part of the adventure is up to you.* Sylviel is not against using her powers to get her way.

The characters first meet Sylviel in her disguised form of Mayor Amos Dapremont.

Personality. Sylviel has a reputation for being very sociable, always addressing townsfolk by their name and having a pleasant smile on her face whenever she strolls through town. However, she is also very calculating, and says anything she needs to in order to achieve her goal of framing Horace for her murder and eloping with Norman.

Appearance. Sylviel typically presents as an older human with curly red hair. She has a slight limp in her left leg and is bruised all over.

JUST A NOTE

Sylviel and Horace were older when they got married, each retained their separate housing. One of the biggest deciding factors was that Horace often had to work the graveyard shift. Sylviel always said if she was going to sleep alone, she wanted to do so in the comfort of her own home. She begged Norman not to run for City Watch because she didn't want to be in another one sided relationship.

FRAMING HORACE

Kidnapped Mayor

Sylviel has been hanging around town posing as the mayor since her "murder." She has Amos, the real mayor, locked safely away in Horace's tool shed under a sleeping draught. With the elections happening next week, she knew he was too busy to need to visit, and if someone were to find Amos in that position, it would certainly help in her framing him. When she kidnapped Amos, she had shifted into Horace's skin so if Amos were to escape, Horace would be implicated.

The Letter

Sylviel gave Norman most of a love letter when they met in secrecy at the Humbuddy six days ago. She planted the last page of the letter in Horace's bedside table.

The Errand Boy

Sylviel, in the form of Horace, sent an Errand Boy to the bank to retrieve a large sum of money from his bank account to help her start a new life, and to help frame Horace by opening up an extremely large life insurance policy. She instructed the errand boy not to bother her (Horace) upon returning, and to just give the withdrawal and paperwork to Sylviel.

Battle of the Barbarians

Sylviel started a heated argument with Horace at the Battle of the Barbarians (where the town barbarians fight in a pit until only one is left standing.) She left before Horace, then he left to her house. She deliberately tried to make the exchange loud enough to be heard by people in the immediate vicinity, including Dave, the ticket taker. In the public eye, Horace was the last person seen with Sylviel.

The "Murder"

Sylviel slaughtered a chicken and used its blood to douse her home in bloody hand prints, making it look like there was a struggle. She also left behind a bloody shoe.

KILLING HORACE

After the group is without a doubt that Horace killed Sylviel, it will need to be announced that Horace has died. I would advise that she kills him when the party goes to investigate his home. Perhaps he hears something coming from the shed and meets them inside after. He'll come face to face with himself (Sylviel) and she'll kill him on the spot after ensuring Amos is still sound asleep. Your party might happen upon this, or they might not. Regardless, they should still be able to find her at the Inn (room 9.) If the party finds Horace's dead body outside his home, they should also find her shed Horace skin. At the end of the adventure, I've written out various possible endings. (Reference Part 2: The Showdown.)

SAMPLE TIMELINE

Before party arrives in Mossbank

1. Sylviel, wife of the head of the City Watch met with Norman, an old flame at the Humbuddy Inn six days ago.
2. The "Battle of the Barbarians" event takes place in the city arena four days ago, where Sylviel gets into an argument with her husband.
3. Sylviel was "murdered" three days ago.

Today

1. The party arrives in Mossbank two hours after Sylviel's funeral.
2. The party meets "Mayor Amos Dapremont," who is portrayed by Sylviel.
3. The party starts investigating in town.
4. The Humbuddy Inn opens at 2 pm where the party may meet Norman.
5. After a pleasant encounter with Norman, the party investigates his home.
6. The party meets Horace, the Head of City Watch and husband to the "deceased." He may take the characters to his home.
7. Sylviel potentially kills Horace.
8. The party finds Sylviel at the Inn OR the Party sees Sylviel murdering Horace. Either way you're at the showdown. Your party may not follow the timeline (and that's OK.)

CALL TO ACTION: INVESTIGATORS FOR HIRE

The characters arrive just two hours after the funeral of Sylviel. The whole town is pretty shaken up about Sylviel's death, and many shops have closed down to mourn her

death. The party will be greeted by the Mayor, Amos Dapremont (currently portrayed by Sylviel.)

AMOS DAPREMONT

Amos greets the party and offers them 150 gp to aid the town in solving Sylviel's murder. The town is split on who the murderer may be, but most think it was either a jealous old flame, Norman Butterwelk, or her husband, Horace Dungraer. Amos is suspicious of Horace - he's been stressed out by the upcoming elections, and they've been on the rocks for a while. He suggests starting at the City Watch station, where Horace is certain to be. He also invites the party to visit the shops that are open (many have closed for the day due to the funeral.) He also lets the party know that the Humbuddy Tavern opens at 2 pm.

Personality. Sylviel effectively portrays Amos's true personality. The mayor is known to be a truly amicable man, and it is no surprise that he has been elected five terms in a row with no competition. He refers to everyone as friend until he knows their name. Amos will address everyone by their name once he knows it, repeating it and often using it in conversation.

Appearance. Sylviel's portrayal of Amos is indistinguishable from the true Amos, a portly human man with a bushy brown mustache. His smile beams with two golden front teeth. As he talks, he is quite sweaty, and his eyes are slightly shifty, as if he's looking for Sylviel's murderer among the crowd.

PART 1: INVESTIGATING THE TOWN

PLACES TO VISIT

Traveler's Coin (Bank)

City Watch Station

The Arena (Fighting Pit)

The Humbuddy (Local Tavern) opens at 2 p.m.

Warner's Wares (General store)

Chopped Liver (Local Butcher Shop)

Sylviel's House

Horace's House Horace may offer to take the characters to his house at 4 pm when he gets off work

Norman's House Norman may offer the characters directions and keys to his house when they meet him at the Humbuddy

WHODUNIT?

Horace	Norman
Norman	Horace
Bonivelle	Thalia
Reid	Cassidy
Penny	Bernadette
Dave	Warner

TRAVELERS COIN

Although the Traveler's Coin is small, it is a well-kept and upscale looking bank that deals with investment opportunities, real estate, personal and business banking, and life insurance policies.

PENNY, THE BANK OWNER

Penny didn't know Sylviel very well, so she decided to keep the bank open. "Death doesn't stop the bills from coming." Penny is pretty sure that Horace killed Sylviel. Horace had sent an errand boy to withdraw a large amount of gold pieces two days before Sylviel died (she won't say the amount, but she will say it's enough to pay someone off to kill her.) This errand boy also purchased a double platinum life insurance policy for both Sylviel and Horace. She shows the party the paperwork with Horace's signature to prove authenticity. Horace often sends errand boys to do his personal work as he is too busy "protecting the town," to do so himself.

Personality. Penny has a very dry sense of humor and cracks a few jokes when interacting with the characters. She laughs way too hard if any of the characters attempt to humor her.

Appearance. Penny is an elf and walks with a limp but does not like to talk about it. She wears flats and conservative clothing. Her dark brown hair is pulled into a tight bun.

BUSTER AND RALPH, SHADY RUFFIANS

Buster and Ralph are two shady humans (Reference Monster Manual page 343 for the **bandit's** stat block) that Horace hired to scare Norman away from the City Watch election. They are at the bank at the same time as the characters, depositing 20 gp into their accounts.

The ruffians are secretive, but a character can try to coax information out of them with a Charisma (Intimidation) check. The information gained depends on the results of the check:

- **DC 13.** They were hired by Horace.
- **DC 15.** They were hired by Horace to scare Norman away from the election.
- **DC 18 (or making them surrender in combat).** All the above, and a promise to leave Norman alone for good (if that is what the characters desire).

CITY WATCH STATION

The City Watch station could use a few touch ups; the decor is outdated, and it has a funky smell to it. Horace swears that he uses their funding for more watch duties, and that there is no need to update the station as it doesn't directly affect their performance. The only watchmen in the station are Thalia and Horace.

THALIA, THE WATCHWOMAN

Thalia guesses Norman killed Sylviel. She saw him sneak into the Humbuddy with her six days ago and it seemed like they were too close for her comfort. She told Horace, but he didn't seem to care.

Personality. Thalia is quite aloof and has a crude sense of humor. She has the utmost respect for Horace and almost seems to smile when talking about him. She expresses that she doesn't love the smell of the building if asked, but she appreciates Horace putting the town's money to good use.

Appearance. Thalia is a human with a shaved head and a broad nose. She wears a dark green City Watch uniform and has visible forearm tattoos of fighting lions.

THE ARENA

The Arena is a large fighting pit that is used for Battle of the Barbarians and large town meetings. It is set up as a small coliseum (100-foot diameter circle) there's only one entrance/exit. The arena is empty except for Dave.

DAVE, THE TICKET TAKER

Dave deems his testimony to be “game-changing”, so he only offers it if the characters entertain him in a duel amongst themselves. He offers to restore their health with *cure wounds* after the battle. He also solicits bets before the fight. I'd suggest setting a time limit of 10 minutes (out of game) on the battle (perhaps Dave gets bored if it goes on too long.)

Personality. Dave clearly doesn't like his job but clearly loves watching people fight. He is definitely a gambler.

Appearance. Dave is a young dwarf who has a long, slicked-back pony tail and wears glasses too large for his face.

Rules for combat:

1. Non-lethal hits only
2. Dave will give the winner 5 gp and will honor all bets placed.
3. Roll for initiative

THE HUMBUDDY, OPENS AT 2PM

The Humbuddy is a small tavern/inn with approximately 10 guest rooms (although Mossbank never has enough guests to fill all the rooms.) Only a few rooms are rented, mostly by folks in town for the Battle of the Barbarians. The bar area is crowded but homey. There are a few rows of long tables and the bar itself. Outside, there is a small fire pit with a few tree stumps used for small gatherings.

BONIVELLE, THE TAVERN OWNER

Bonivelle attempts to whisper and nod over towards Norman before telling the party her information. Bonivelle is convinced Horace killed Sylviel. She thinks he found out about her and Norman getting a room at the Humbuddy's Inn on Sunday. Sylviel and Norman came in disguises, but Horace is the Head of the City Watch, and has eyes everywhere.

Personality. Bonivelle is extremely interested in gossip; half the town thinks she owns the bar to keep up with local chatter.

Appearance. Bonivelle is a middle-aged elf with a cropped hair cut. She wears an apron that says "Humbuddy Loves You," and is extremely flirtatious toward femme-presenting characters.

REID, THE LOCAL DRUNK

Reid thinks Horace killed Sylviel. They saw Horace talking to some shady looking folks outside the Arena before the Battle of the Barbarians. Reid doesn't think it's a coincidence Sylviel was found dead the next day.

Personality. For someone who usually has a drink in their hands, Reid is very intuitive. It's very apparent that Reid is a high functioning alcoholic.

Appearance. Reid is a human in their early forties. They wear many cool blue hues in their wardrobe.

WARNER'S WARES

Warner's Wares sells necessities like food, clothing, and firewood. It is a medium-sized store that most citizens utilize. The more privileged citizens import their wares.

WARNER, THE OWNER

Warner is certain that Norman murdered Sylviel. Last week, he came in to purchase rope, gardening shears, and an axe. Why else would he purchase that stuff? He doesn't garden. He's gotten the same order for the past 10 years: 20 baskets of vegetables, 5 baskets of fruit, and 10 baskets of non-perishables.

Personality. Warner enjoys chatting with their customers. They ask the characters to purchase something if they want information, but ultimately will reluctantly reveal what they know regardless.

Appearance. Warner is an older human with golden shoulder-length hair. They wear combat boots, although they've never fought a day in their life, and have a colorful wardrobe.

CHOPPED LIVER

The Chopped Liver has been in the Dulart family for generations. The Dulart family also owns a cattle ranch to supply their own free-range meat. The meat is slightly more expensive than your average butcher shop, but the citizens of Mossbank are willing to pay the price. They specialize in chicken, cow, and elk.

CASSIDY, THE BUTCHER

Cassidy can't believe Sylviel is really dead. She was in the store buying one of his egg-laying chickens just days before she supposedly “died.” He has a gut feeling Norman did it out of jealousy.

Personality. Cassidy is a very quiet young man. He answers questions and speaks freely about his grief. His father died last year in a freak butchering accident, and Cassidy was the only heir to the Chopped Liver. Talking about death reminds Cassidy of his late father, leaving him prone to tears.

Appearance. Cassidy is a human with broad shoulders and tired eyes. His hands are callused and he wears weathered clothing.

SYLVIEL'S HOUSE

Sylviel lived in a small one-bedroom cottage near the city center. Sylviel's house was turned upside down and bloodied the day of her murder; it appears as if Sylviel certainly put up a good fight. As far as anyone can tell, nothing has been taken or destroyed. Sylviel's mom, Bernadette, has worked most of the blood stains out of the flooring, but there are a few areas that were heavily saturated.

BERNADETTE, SYLVEIL'S MOTHER

Bernadette is still trying to clean up Sylviel's house, although she mostly just sits on the ground cursing and sniffing. Bernadette is disgusted that someone would kill her daughter and then take her body with them. Bernadette thinks it might have been Norman. Sylviel had confided in her that she had some business to attend to

with Norman Sunday evening, and they were going to meet again. She can find the receipt room 9 for this evening. Nobody knows what Norman does but Bernadette saw him with some shady characters lately, perhaps he hired them to kill Sylviel. Bernadette has no idea that Sylviel's father was a doppelganger. He was just a guy passing through the city that caught her eye.

Personality. Bernadette used to be a kind-hearted woman, but her grief is currently making her prone to bouts of anger

Appearance. Bernadette is a spry human in her mid-70s with wispy white hair. Her finger nails have been chewed off, and she bites the corner of her top lip.

NORMAN'S HOUSE

Norman lives in a small one-bedroom bungalow with a den and kitchen inside. Outside there a small plot of land that holds a small shed with a lock on the door. Inside the shed, the characters can find the rope, gardening shears, and an axe that Warner mentioned (if they visited Warner's Wares.) They can also find chopped wood, a potted rose plant, gardening gloves, and stakes inside the shed. Outside, there is a small tilled area.

If confronted, Norman admits that he had planned on planting a rose garden for Sylviel, but now the thought of looking at her favorite flowers saddens him. In his bedroom there is a small bed, bedside table, and desk. Inside the bedside table, there is a love letter from Sylviel to Norman detailing when she planned on leaving Horace to live a life of love with Norman. She has also asked Norman to meet her at 6 pm on today's date at the inn, room number 9. The pages are numbered - page 3 of 3 is missing. On the desk rests Norman's private journal. Skimming through the journal reveals that Norman thinks he's being watched by a shady group. He's extremely paranoid and has been careful to only travel to public places.

PART TWO: THE SHOWDOWN

HORACE'S HOUSE

Make sure you've read the next two sections and refer to them as the party visits Horace's house. Horace lives in a larger one-bedroom home. Outside, there is a tool shed behind his home. There is no lock on the door but, it is rigged with a trap. A character that succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds a magical owl glyph disguised on the door. Disabling it requires a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana) check. If a creature other than Sylviel touches the door while the trap is not disabled, the glyph activates a *modify memory* spell (save DC 12) that affects any creature within 15 feet of the door. On a failed save, a target loses the last two minutes of its memory. The trap will reset after two minutes.

Inside Horace's bedroom there is a desk, a bedside table, and a large unmade bed. A creature searching the bedside table and succeeding on a DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check notices a false bottom to the table. Inside it is a very crumpled "page three" of Sylviel's love letter to Norman.

P.S. I believe Horace is having an affair with one of his guards. While I am not surprised, I have a feeling if I don't escape this marriage soon, I may never have another chance.

*All my love,
Your dearest Sylviel*

Inside his desk drawer the party can find a wrinkled contract; as if water had been thrown on it. A DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals a few sentences are still legible. The group can read that Horace had hired two ruffians two days ago for 20 gp a piece to follow Norman and tell him not to enter the election for Head of the City Watch. They met at the Arena.

HORACE'S HOUSE - PARTY GOES WITH HORACE TO SHED

So you've gotten Horace all the way to his home with the party? I'd suggest having Horace hear something coming from the shed and letting the party go inside without him. If they are dead set on going with him, so be it. Horace and the party will come face to face with another Horace. **Roll for Initiative.** After defeating or the second Horace, the shifting skin will fade away show a dying Sylviel. In her last breaths she'll reveal that she just wanted to be free from their loveless marriage; she never meant to hurt anyone.

HORACE'S HOUSE - PARTY GOES INSIDE HOUSE WHEN HORACE GOES TO SHED

So you've gotten Horace all the way to his home with the party? I'd suggest having Horace hear something coming from the shed and letting the party go inside without him. Once the party has searched his home, they'll find his body outside his home by the shed. The shed door will be open, leaving the party to find Amos. He will be extremely disoriented, swearing that Horace kidnapped him and wasn't making sense, he was talking about murdering himself? Outside the shed, a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) reveals shed "Horace" skin and a key to the inn. It should be nearly 5:30 pm by now, the party can head to the Inn to catch Sylviel.

FINDING SYLVIEL AT THE INN

Sylviel can be found in room 9 at the Inn. She'll be expecting Norman and will be quite flustered with a visit by the party.

"Do you know what it's like to be in a loveless marriage? I just wanted an out; I know he's been unfaithful. I didn't mean to hurt anyone." Sylviel cries.

Sylviel lies and tries to reason with the party - she was never going to kill Horace. He provoked her and was going to kill her, so she acted in self-defense. If the party hasn't pieced all the clues together, she tells them how she framed him to buy herself more time. She tries to escape without fighting the party but defends herself if attacked.

APPENDIX A

SYLVIEL

Medium humanoid (shapechanger), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 35 (7d8+7)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

Skills Deception +9, Sleight of Hand +8, Stealth +8

Condition Immunities charmed

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Battle Ready. As a bonus action, Sylviel releases extra adrenaline and gains 8 temporary hit points. The next attack against her has disadvantage.

Shapechanger. Sylviel can use an action to polymorph into a Small or Medium humanoid she has seen, or back into her true form. Her statistics, other than her size, are the same in each form. Any equipment she is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. Any time she transforms, she must shed the old skin, which appears on the floor in her space. She reverts to her true form if she dies."

ACTIONS

Talon. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3)

Screeth. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) *Reactions*

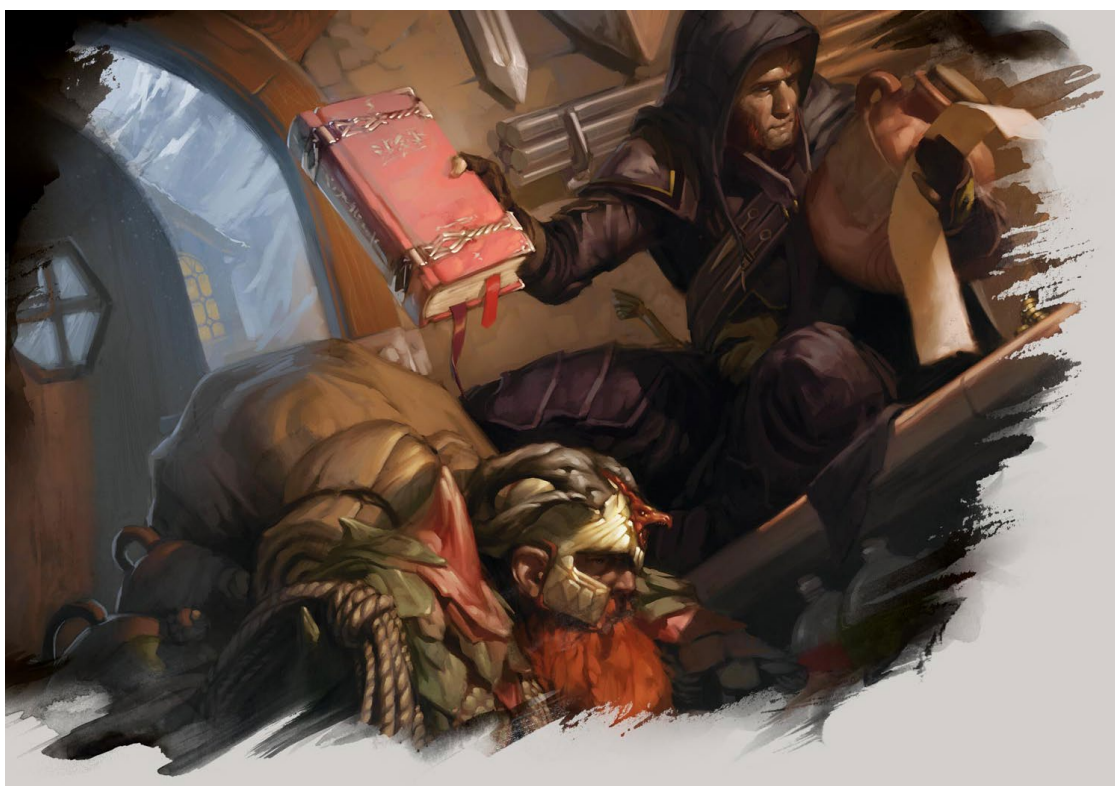
REACTIONS

Shifting Escape. If Sylviel is hit by an attack, she can use a reaction to polymorph into an owl.

Unearthed Arcana:Folk of the Feywild and Draconic Options

Play as a fairy, hobgoblin, owlfolk, or rabbitfolk and harness the magical powers of dragons.

by Ben Petrisor, Taymoor Rehman, Dan Dillon, Ari Levitch, James Wyatt, and Jeremy Crawford, with input from the rest of the D&D design team



Playtest Material

The material here is presented for playtesting and to spark your imagination. These game mechanics are in draft form, usable in your campaign but not refined by final game development and editing. They aren't officially part of the game and aren't permitted in D&D Adventurers League events.

If we decide to make this material official, it will be refined based on your feedback, and then it will appear in a D&D book.

FOLK OF THE FEYWILD

When you spin your fantasy to create a D&D character, you decide whether it is a member of the human race or one of the game's other fantastical races. The Feywild is home to many non-human peoples, and that region adds four new race options courtesy of *Unearthed Arcana*. They include:

- Fairy
- Hobgoblin of the Feywild
- Owlfolk
- Rabbitfolk

Fairy

Fairies use the fey creature type and can differ widely in appearance, behavior, and attitude. They are a wee folk and are small in size. And while they're not as small as their pixie and sprite friends, fairies can squeeze through a space as narrow as one inch wide.

Many fairies have a physical characteristic that sets them apart from other creatures of their kind. A roll on the Fey Characteristic table (see PDF) might determine if they have shimmering, multicolored skin or smell like fresh brownies, or a player can create their own characteristic if none of those fit the character.

They also have a magical flying speed equal to their walking speed and can hover without the use of their wings (if they have them).

Infused with the magic of the Feywild, they know the *druidcraft* cantrip and can cast *faerie fire* without expending a spell slot once per long rest.

Hobgoblin of the Feywild

Hobgoblins first appeared in the Feywild, and that origin has left its mark. Their fey ancestry makes them difficult to charm and they have curved, pointed ears and noses that turn red or blue during displays of emotion.

Hobgoblins continue to channel an aspect of that region's rule of

reciprocity, which creates a mystical bond between the giver and the receiver of a gift. They can take the Help action a set number of times per day and trigger a benefit for themselves and another target. This can deliver temporary hit points, increase their walking speeds by 10 feet or give enemies disadvantage on their attacks against those targets.

Hobgoblins also draw on their allies to aid them if they miss with an attack roll or fail an ability check or a saving throw. They can gain a bonus to a roll that's equal to the number of allies they can see within 30 feet (maximum of +5).

Owlfolk

Distant kin of giant owls, owlfolk come in many shapes and sizes—from petite and fluffy to wide-winged and majestic. They have arms and legs like other humanoids, as well as wings that extend from their back and shoulders.

Those wings allow them to make a Dexterity saving throw when they would otherwise fall, and on a success they fly in place. Their feathers also make no sound when they fly, giving them proficiency in the Stealth skill.

Their darkvision extends to 90 feet in dim light and their ancestral ties to the Feywild also allow them to innately see the magic of their surroundings. This allows owlfolk to cast the detect magic spell, either as a ritual or by using available spell slots.

Rabbitfolk

Bounding across the wilds in fur that comes in a variety of colors, rabbitfolk embody a spirit of freedom and travel. Their keen senses make them proficient in the Perception skill and also allow them to add their proficiency bonus to their initiative rolls.

With characteristic long feet and powerful legs, these bipedal humanoids are full of energy, like a wound-up spring. If they walk at least five feet in a turn, they can hop an extra d12 feet in a direction of their choice.

Rabbitfolk are also blessed with fey luck, and often find themselves a

few fortunate feet away from danger. When they fail a Dexterity saving throw, they can use their reaction to roll a d4 and add it to the result.

[DOWNLOAD THE PDF NOW](#)

DRACONIC OPTIONS

Harness the power of dragons with **new race, feat, and spell options**. Playtest possibilities include three variant dragonborn races and a fresh look at kobolds. Elsewhere, three feat options reflect a connection to draconic power, while new spells offer a way to manifest dragon magic.

Draconic Races

The dragonborn race reflects a character with dragons somewhere in their family tree and this trio of variants offers a clearer connection to specific draconic ancestry. All variants have a thirty-foot long/five-foot wide breath weapon and are resistant to the damage type associated with their ancestry.

- **Chromatic Dragonborn:** Dragonborn with this ancestry claim the raw elemental power of the chromatic dragons. At 3rd level, they can become immune to the damage type associated with their ancestry for ten minutes.
- **Metallic Dragonborn:** Dragonborn with this ancestry lay claim to the unflinching tenacity of the metallic dragons. Their breath weapon forces each creature in the area to succeed on a Strength saving throw or be pushed twenty feet away and knocked prone. Each creature in the area must also succeed on a Constitution saving throw or become incapacitated.
- **Gem Dragonborn:** These dragonborn are heirs of the ruby dragon, Sardior—the firstborn of all creation, made by Bahamut and Tiamat in the first days of the First World. They can telepathically speak to any creature within thirty feet, although the creature isn't able to respond. At 3rd level they can fly for one minute using spectral wings.
- **Kobold:** In some lands, kobolds serve chromatic or metallic

dragons—even worshiping them as divine beings. In other places, kobolds know too well how dangerous those dragons can be and help others defend against their destruction. Each kobold's draconic connection can manifest in a different way: choosing to have advantage on saving throws against the frightened condition; knowing one cantrip from the sorcerer spell list; making unarmed strikes with their tail; or letting out a draconic roar to gain advantage over enemies within ten feet.

FEATS

A feat represents a character achieving mastery in one of their capabilities or discovering the ability to do something completely new. When this arises from a draconic source, it can have dramatic supernatural effects.

Gift of the Chromatic Dragon

As a bonus action, you can infuse a simple or martial weapon to deal 1d4 additional acid, cold, fire, lightning, or poison damage. You can also use your reaction to gain resistance to one of those five damage types.

Gift of the Metallic Dragon

You learn the cure wounds spell and can cast it without expending a spell slot. You can also manifest protective wings to shield yourself or a creature within five feet of you from attacks, adding a d4 to the target's AC bonus.

Gift of the Gem Dragon

Increase your Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma score by one, to a maximum of twenty. When a creature within ten feet damages you, you can force it to make a Strength saving throw or take telekinetic damage and be pushed ten feet away.

SPELLS

Draconic magic also manifests itself in an assortment of spells—many of those bearing the names of famous (or infamous) creatures within the world of Dungeons & Dragons.

Draconic Transformation, 7th level

You gain the following benefits until the spell ends: blindsight to

thirty feet; a flying speed of forty feet; and a thirty-foot energy cone attack.

Fizban's Platinum Shield, 6th level

The protected creature gains: half cover; resistance to acid, cold, fire, lightning, and poison damage; and the ability to ignore damage on a successful Dexterity saving throw.

Flame Stride, 3rd level

The affected creature's speed increases by twenty feet and moving doesn't provoke opportunity attacks. Creatures (or objects that aren't being worn or carried) within five feet of its trail of heat take 1d6 fire damage.

Icingdeath's Frost, 2nd level

A creature that fails its save takes cold damage, has its speed reduced to 0 and is covered in ice for one minute (or until a creature uses its action to break the ice).

Nathair's Mischief, 2nd level

A twenty-foot cube fills with fey and draconic magic. Roll a d4 on the Mischievous Surge table (see PDF) to determine the effect. Options may charm, blind, incapacitate, or slow the movement of those affected, and you can move the cube up to ten feet each turn and reroll the effect.

Raulothim's Psychic Lance, 4th level

You can either shoot this shimmering lance of psychic power from your forehead or name a target within range, who gains no benefit from cover or invisibility as the lance homes in on them.

Summon Draconic Spirit, 5th level

You call forth a chromatic, gem, or metallic draconic spirit, which has damage resistances based on its type. The draconic spirit's multiattack allows it to use its thirty-foot cone breath weapon, alongside a number of bite and claw attacks.

[DOWNLOAD THE PDF NOW](#)

To see the full treasure trove of *Unearthed Arcana* articles, covering new classes and feats, conversions of rules from previous editions, and much more, [visit the archive](#).



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UNEARTHED ARCANA 2021

Folk of the Feywild

By Taymoor Rehman, Ari Levitch, and Jeremy Crawford, with input from the rest of the D&D design team

This Is Playtest Material

The material in this article is presented for playtesting and to spark your imagination. These game mechanics are in draft form, usable in your campaign but not refined by full game design and editing. They aren't officially part of the game and aren't permitted in D&D Adventurers League events.

The best way for you to give us feedback is in the survey we'll release on the D&D website soon. If we decide to make this material official, it will be refined based on your feedback, and then it will appear in a D&D book.

The character options you read here might be more or less powerful than options in the *Player's Handbook*. If a design survives playtesting, we adjust its power to the desirable level before official publication. This means an option could be more or less powerful in its final form.

This document features four new race options to playtest for player characters in D&D:

- Fairy
- Hobgoblin of the Feywild
- Owlfolk
- Rabbitfolk

Creating Your Character

When you create your D&D character, you decide whether your character is a member of the human race or one of the game's fantastical races. If you create a character using a race option presented here, follow these additional rules during character creation.

Ability Score Increases

When determining your character's ability scores, increase one of those scores by 2 and a different score by 1, or increase three different scores by 1. Follow this rule regardless of the method you use to determine the scores, such as rolling or point buy.

The "Quick Build" section for your character's class offers suggestions on which scores to increase. You're free to follow those suggestions

or to ignore them. Whichever scores you decide to increase, none of the scores can be raised above 20.

Languages

Your character can speak, read, and write Common and one other language that you and your DM agree is appropriate for the character. The *Player's Handbook* offers a list of widespread languages to choose from. The DM is free to add or remove languages from that list for a particular campaign.

Creature Type

Every creature in D&D, including every player character, has a special tag in the rules that identifies the type of creature they are. Most player characters are of the Humanoid type. A race option presented here tells you what your character's creature type is.

Here's a list of the game's creature types in alphabetical order: Aberration, Beast, Celestial, Construct, Dragon, Elemental, Fey, Fiend, Giant, Humanoid, Monstrosity, Ooze, Plant, Undead. These types don't have rules themselves, but some rules in the game affect creatures of certain types in different ways. For example, the text of the *cure wounds* spell specifies that the spell doesn't work on a creature that has the Construct type.

Design Note

The "Creating Your Character" section provides special character-creation rules for the race options in this article. The races that use these rules can coexist seamlessly with races that use other rules. For example, the race options in the *Player's Handbook* have built-in ability score increases, while the races in this article don't. Race options from both sources can adventure together.

If you'd like a race that doesn't appear in this article, such as an elf or a dwarf, to have similar ability score flexibility, the book *Tasha's Cauldron of Everything* provides a rule, called Customizing Your Origin, that gives you that flexibility. That book also gives you the

option of building your own race, rather than choosing an existing one. That option is called the Custom Lineage. No matter which option you choose for your character—a race in this article, a *Player's Handbook* race, a race modified by the Customizing Your Origin rule, or a Custom Lineage—you can adventure with characters who are built with a different option.

This sidebar builds on the design note in our previous Unearthed Arcana, "Gothic Lineages."

Fairy

The Feywild is home to many fantastic peoples, including fairies. Fairies are a wee folk, but not nearly as much so as their pixie and sprite friends.

Infused with the magic of the Feywild, fairies share a few commonalities with one another but can differ widely in appearance, behavior, and attitude. Many fairies have a special physical characteristic that sets them apart from other creatures of their kind. For your fairy, roll on the Fey Characteristic table or choose an option from it. The Feywild is a wild place, so come up with your own characteristic if none of these fit your character.

Fey Characteristics

d8	Characteristic
1	You have small wings like those of an insect.
2	You have shimmering, multicolored skin.
3	You have exceptionally large ears.
4	A constant, glittering mist surrounds you.
5	You have a small spectral horn on your forehead, like a little unicorn horn.
6	Your hands never look dirty.
7	You smell like fresh brownies.
8	A noticeable, harmless chill surrounds you.

Fairy Traits

You have the following racial traits.

Creature Type. You are a Fey.

Size. You are Small.

Speed. Your walking speed is 30 feet.

Fairy Flight. You have a flying speed equal to your walking speed and can hover. This flight is magical and does not require the use of your wings (if you have them).

Fairy Magic. You know the *druidcraft* and *faerie fire* spells. You can cast *faerie fire* without expending a spell slot, and you must finish a long rest before you can cast it this way again. You

can also cast this spell using any spell slots you have. Your spellcasting ability for these spells is your choice of Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma.

Fey Passage. You can squeeze through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide.

Hobgoblin of the Feywild

Hobgoblins trace their origins to the Feywild, where they first appeared with their goblin and bugbear kin. That history has left its mark, for though hobgoblins are found throughout the Material Plane, they continue to channel an aspect of the Feywild's rule of reciprocity, which creates a mystical bond between the giver and the receiver of a gift.

On some worlds, such bonds lead hobgoblins to form communities with deep ties to each other. In the Forgotten Realms, vast hobgoblin legions have emerged, with ranks upon ranks of devoted soldiers noteworthy for how effective they are at fighting as a unit.

Hobgoblins are generally taller than their goblin cousins but not quite as big as bugbears. They have curved, pointed ears and noses that turn red or blue during displays of emotion.

Hobgoblin Traits

You have the following racial traits.

Creature Type. You are a Humanoid.

Size. You are Medium.

Speed. Your walking speed is 30 feet.

Darkvision. You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light and in darkness as if it were dim light. You discern colors in that darkness only as shades of gray.

Fey Ancestry. You have advantage on saving throws you make to avoid or end the charmed condition on yourself.

Fey Gift. You can use this trait to take the Help action as a bonus action, and you can do so a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus. You regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Starting at 3rd level, choose one of the options below each time you take the Help action, whether as a bonus action or an action:

Hospitality. You and the target of your Help action each gain a number of temporary hit points equal to 1d6 plus your proficiency bonus.

Passage. You and the target of your Help action each increase your walking speeds by 10 feet until the start of your next turn.

Spite. Until the start of your next turn, the first time you or the target of your Help action hits a creature with an attack roll, that creature has disadvantage on the next attack roll that it makes within the next minute.

Fortune from the Many. If you miss with an attack roll or fail an ability check or a saving throw, you can draw on your bonds of reciprocity to gain a bonus to the roll equal to the number of allies you can see within 30 feet of you (maximum bonus of +5). You can use this trait a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses you finish a long rest.

Owlfolk

Distant kin of giant owls, owlfolk come in many shapes and sizes, from petite and fluffy to wide-winged and majestic. Owlfolk have arms and legs like other Humanoids, as well as wings that extend from their back and shoulders.

Because of their ancestral tie to the Feywild, owlfolk can innately see the magic of their surroundings. Like owls, owlfolk are graced with feathers that make no sound when they move or fly, making it easy for them to sneak up on you in the library.

Your owlfolk character might be nocturnal. Or perhaps your character is simply prone to rise later, embodying the common nickname of night owl.

Owlfolk Traits

You have the following racial traits.

Creature Type. You are a Humanoid.

Size. You are Medium or Small. You choose the size when you gain this race.

Speed. Your walking speed is 30 feet.

Darkvision. You can see in dim light within 90 feet of you as if it were bright light and in darkness as if it were dim light. You discern colors in that darkness only as shades of gray.

Magic Sight. Your keen senses can focus to see the presence of magic. You gain the ability to cast the *detect magic* spell, but only as a ritual. Your spellcasting ability for this spell is your choice of Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma. You can also cast this spell normally with any spell slots you have.

Nimble Flight. Thanks to your wings, you have a flying speed equal to your walking speed. When you fall, you can use your reaction to make a Dexterity saving throw (DC 10) to stop falling and fly in place until the start of your next turn.

Silent Feathers. You have proficiency in the Stealth skill.

Rabbitfolk

Bounding across the wilds, rabbitfolk from the Feywild embody a spirit of freedom and travel.

Rabbitfolk are bipedal, with the characteristic long feet of the animal they resemble and fur in a variety of colors. They share the keen senses and powerful legs of leporine creatures and are full of energy, like a wound-up spring. Rabbitfolk are blessed with a little fey luck, and they often find themselves a few fortunate feet away from dangers during adventures.

Rabbitfolk Traits

You have the following racial traits.

Creature Type. You are a Humanoid.

Size. You are Medium or Small. You choose the size when you gain this race.

Speed. Your walking speed is 30 feet.

Hare-Trigger. You add your proficiency bonus to your initiative rolls.

Leporine Senses. You have proficiency in the Perception skill.

Lucky Footwork. When you fail a Dexterity saving throw, you can use your reaction to roll a d4 and add it to the result, potentially turning the failure into a success.

Rabbit Hop. Once during each of your turns when you walk at least 5 feet, you can hop, rolling a d12 and moving that many feet in a direction of your choice. This extra distance doesn't cost movement, but you can hop only if your speed isn't 0.

UNEARTHED ARCANA 2021

Draconic Options

By Ben Petrisor, Taymoor Rehman, Dan Dillon, James Wyatt, and Jeremy Crawford

This playtest document presents race, feat, and spell options related to dragons in *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*. First is a trio of draconic race options presented as an alternative to the dragonborn race in the *Player's Handbook*, as well as a fresh look at the kobold race. Then comes a handful of feat options that reflect a connection to draconic power. Finally, an assortment of spells—many of them bearing the names of famous or infamous dragons—offer a variety of approaches to manifesting dragon magic.

This Is Playtest Material

The D&D material in this article is presented for playtesting and to spark your imagination. These game mechanics are in draft form, usable in your D&D campaign but not refined by full game design and editing. They aren't officially part of the game and aren't permitted in D&D Adventurers League events.

Feedback. The best way for you to give us feedback on this material is in the survey we'll release on the D&D website soon. If we decide to make this material official, it will be refined based on your feedback, and then it will appear in a D&D book.

Power Level. The character options you read here might be more or less powerful than options in the *Player's Handbook*. If a design survives playtesting, we adjust its power to the desirable level before official publication. This means an option could be more or less powerful in its final form.

Draconic Races

The dragonborn race in the *Player's Handbook* is one way to reflect a character with dragons somewhere far back in their ancestry. This document offers three variant dragonborn races you can choose instead, if you want a character with clearer connections to a specific draconic ancestry, as well as a new version of the kobold race. When you're making a new character using one of these races, use the rules under "Creating Your Character" to fill out the details of your character.

Creating Your Character

When you create your D&D character, you decide whether your character is a member of the human race or one of the game's fantastical races. Alternatively, you can choose one of the following draconic races. If you create a character using a race option presented here, follow these additional rules during character creation.

Ability Score Increases

When determining your character's ability scores, you increase one of those scores by 2 and increase a different score by 1, or you increase three different scores by 1. Follow this rule regardless of the method you use to determine the scores, such as rolling or point buy.

The "Quick Build" section for your character's class offers suggestions on which scores to increase. You're free to follow those suggestions or to ignore them. Whichever scores you decide to increase, none of the scores can be raised above 20.

Languages

Your character can speak, read, and write Common and one other language that you and your DM agree is appropriate for the character. The *Player's Handbook* offers a list of widespread languages to choose from. The DM is free to add or remove languages from that list for a particular campaign.

Creature Type

Every creature in D&D, including every player character, has a special tag in the rules that identifies the type of creature they are. Most player characters are of the Humanoid type. A race option presented here tells you what your character's creature type is.

Here's a list of the game's creature types in alphabetical order: Aberration, Beast, Celestial, Construct, Dragon, Elemental, Fey, Fiend, Giant,

Humanoid, Monstrosity, Ooze, Plant, Undead. These types don't have rules themselves, but some rules in the game affect creatures of certain types in different ways. For example, the text of the *cure wounds* spell specifies that the spell doesn't work on a creature that has the Construct type.

Chromatic Dragonborn

Dragonborn with chromatic ancestry claim the raw elemental power of the chromatic dragons. The vibrant colors of the chromatics—black, blue, green, red, and white—gleam in their scaled skin and in the deadly energy of their breath weapons. Theirs is the raw elemental fury of the volcano, of biting arctic winds, of raging lightning storms; theirs also is the subtle whisper of swamp and forest, corrosive and toxic.

Chromatic Dragonborn Traits

You have the following racial traits.

Creature Type. You are a Humanoid.

Size. You are Medium.

Speed. Your walking speed is 30 feet.

Chromatic Ancestry. You trace your ancestry to a chromatic dragon, granting you a special magical affinity. Choose one type of dragon from the Chromatic Ancestry table. This determines the damage type for your other traits as shown in the table.

Chromatic Ancestry

Dragon	Damage Type
Black	Acid
Blue	Lightning
Green	Poison
Red	Fire
White	Cold

Breath Weapon. When you take the Attack action, you can replace one of your attacks with an exhalation of a magical energy in a 30-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in the area must make a Dexterity saving throw against a DC equal to 8 + your Constitution modifier + your proficiency bonus. A creature takes 2d8 damage of the type associated with your Chromatic Ancestry on a failed save, and half as much damage on a successful one. This damage

increases by 1d8 when you reach 5th level (3d8), 11th level (4d8), and 17th level (5d8).

You can use this trait a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Draconic Resistance. You have resistance to the damage type associated with your Chromatic Ancestry.

Chromatic Warding. Starting at 3rd level, as an action, you can channel your draconic energies to protect yourself. For 10 minutes, you become immune to the damage type associated with your Chromatic Ancestry. Once you use this trait, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.

Metallic Dragonborn

Dragonborn with metallic ancestry lay claim to the unflinching tenacity of the metallic dragons—brass, bronze, copper, gold, and silver—whose hues glint in their scales. Theirs is the fire of hearth and forge, the cold of high mountain air, the spark of inspiration, and the scouring touch of acid that cleanses and purifies.

Metallic Dragonborn Traits

You have the following racial traits.

Creature Type. You are a Humanoid.

Size. You are Medium.

Speed. Your walking speed is 30 feet.

Metallic Ancestry. You trace your ancestry to a metallic dragon, granting you a special magical affinity. Choose one type of dragon from the Metallic Ancestry table. This determines the damage type for your other traits as shown in the table.

Metallic Ancestry

Dragon	Damage Type
Brass	Fire
Bronze	Lightning
Copper	Acid
Gold	Fire
Silver	Cold

Breath Weapon. When you take the Attack action, you can replace one of your attacks with an exhalation of a magical energy in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a Dexterity saving throw against a DC equal to 8 + your Constitution modifier + your proficiency

bonus. A creature takes 2d8 damage of the type associated with your Metallic Ancestry on a failed save, and half as much damage on a successful one. This damage increases by 1d8 when you reach 5th level (3d8), 11th level (4d8), and 17th level (5d8).

You can use this trait a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Draconic Resistance. You have resistance to the damage type associated with your Metallic Ancestry.

Metallic Breath Weapon. At 3rd level you gain a second breath weapon. When you take the Attack action, you can replace one of your attacks with an exhalation of a magical gas in a 15-foot cone. The save DC for this breath is 8 + your Constitution modifier + your proficiency bonus. When you use this ability, choose one:

- Each creature in the area must succeed on a Strength saving throw or be pushed 20 feet away from you and be knocked prone.
- Each creature in the area must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or become incapacitated until the start of your next turn.

Once you use your Metallic Breath Weapon, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.

Gem Dragonborn

Dragonborn with gem ancestry partake of the heritage of all gem dragons, who claim to be heirs of the ruby dragon, Sardior—the firstborn of all creation, made by Bahamut and Tiamat in the first days of the First World. The colors and mysterious powers of the gem dragons—amethyst, crystal, emerald, sapphire, and topaz—gleam in their scaled skin and course through their veins. Theirs are the wonders of the mind, the force of will, the brilliant light of insight, the resounding echo of discovery, and the desiccation of despair.

Gem Dragonborn Traits

You have the following racial traits.

Creature Type. You are a Humanoid.

Size. You are Medium.

Speed. Your walking speed is 30 feet.

Gem Ancestry. You trace your ancestry to a gem dragon, granting you a special magical

affinity. Choose one type of dragon from the Gem Ancestry table. This determines the damage type for your other traits as shown in the table.

Gem Ancestry

Dragon	Damage Type
Amethyst	Force
Crystal	Radiant
Emerald	Psychic
Sapphire	Thunder
Topaz	Necrotic

Breath Weapon. When you take the Attack action, you can replace one of your attacks with an exhalation of a magical energy in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a Dexterity saving throw against a DC equal to 8 + your Constitution modifier + your proficiency bonus. A creature takes 2d8 damage of the type associated with your Gem Ancestry on a failed save, and half as much damage on a successful one. This damage increases by 1d8 when you reach 5th level (3d8), 11th level (4d8), and 17th level (5d8).

You can use this trait a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Draconic Resistance. You have resistance to the damage type associated with your Gem Ancestry.

Psionic Mind. You can telepathically speak to any creature you can see within 30 feet of you. You don't need to share a language with the creature, but the creature must be able to understand at least one language. Your communication doesn't give the creature the ability to respond to you telepathically.

Gem Flight. Starting at 3rd level, you can use your bonus action to temporarily summon an array of spectral gems that match your Gem Ancestry in the shape of wings that last for 1 minute. For the duration, you gain a flying speed equal to your walking speed and can hover. Once you use this trait, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.

Kobold

Some of the smallest draconic creatures to walk the planes, kobolds display their draconic ancestry in the glint of their scales and in their roars. Legends tell of the first kobolds emerging from the Underdark near the lairs of the earliest

dragons. In some lands, kobolds serve chromatic or metallic dragons—even worshipping them as divine beings. In other places, kobolds know too well how dangerous those dragons can be and help others defend against draconic destruction.

Whatever their relationship to dragons, kobold scales tend to be rust colored, although the occasional kobold sports scale color more akin to that of a chromatic or a metallic dragon. The roar of a kobold can express a range of emotion: anger, resolve, elation, fear, and more. Regardless of the emotion the kobold expresses, the roar resonates with draconic power.

Kobold Traits

You have the following racial traits.

Creature Type. You are a Humanoid.

Size. You are Small.

Speed. Your walking speed is 30 feet

Darkvision. You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light and in darkness as if it were dim light. You discern colors in that darkness only as shades of gray.

Draconic Legacy. The kobold connection to dragons can manifest in unpredictable ways in an individual kobold. Choose one of the following legacy options when you select this race:

- You have advantage on saving throws to avoid or end the frightened condition on yourself.
- You know one cantrip of your choice from the sorcerer spell list. Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma is your spellcasting ability for that cantrip (choose when you select this race).
- You can make unarmed strikes with your tail. When you hit with it, the strike deals 1d6 + your Strength modifier bludgeoning damage, instead of the bludgeoning damage normal for an unarmed strike.

Draconic Roar. As a bonus action, you let out a draconic roar at your enemies within 10 feet of you. Until the end of your next turn, you and your allies have advantage on attack rolls against any of those enemies who could hear the roar. You can use this trait a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Feats

A feat represents a character achieving mastery in one of their capabilities or discovering the ability to do something completely new. When this mastery arises from a draconic source—whether it's the gift of a true dragon, the manifestation of some draconic heritage, the blessing of a draconic god, or as a consequence of slaying a true dragon—it can have dramatic supernatural effects.

Gift of the Chromatic Dragon

You've manifested some of the power of chromatic dragons, granting you the following benefits:

- As a bonus action, you can touch a simple or martial weapon and infuse it with one of the following damage types: acid, cold, fire, lightning, or poison. For the next minute, the weapon deals an extra 1d4 damage of the chosen type when it hits. After you use this ability, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.
- When you take acid, cold, fire, lightning, or poison damage, you can use your reaction to give yourself resistance to that instance of damage. You can use this reaction a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Gift of the Metallic Dragon

You've manifested some of the power of metallic dragons, granting you the following benefits:

- You learn the *cure wounds* spell. You can cast this spell without expending a spell slot. Once you cast this spell in this way, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest. You can also cast this spell using spell slots you have. The spell's spellcasting ability is Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma when you cast it with this feat (choose when you gain the feat).
- You can manifest protective wings that can shield you or others from attacks. When you or another creature you can see within 5 feet of you is hit by an attack roll, you can use your reaction to manifest spectral wings from your

back for a moment. Roll a d4 and grant a bonus to the target's AC equal to the number rolled against that attack roll, potentially causing it to miss. You can use this reaction a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Gift of the Gem Dragon

You've manifested some of the power of gem dragons, granting you the following benefits:

- Increase your Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- When you take damage from a creature that is within 10 feet of you, you can use your reaction to emanate telekinetic energy. The creature that dealt damage to you must succeed on a Strength saving throw (DC equals 8 + your proficiency bonus + the ability modifier of the score increased by this feat) or take 2d8 force damage and be pushed 10 feet away from you. You can use this reaction a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Spells

This section contains new spells that the DM may add to a campaign, making them available to player characters and monster spellcasters alike. The Spells table lists the new spells, ordering them by level. The table also notes the school of magic of a spell, whether it requires concentration, whether it bears the ritual tag, and which classes have access to it.

Spells

Level	Spell	School	Conc.	Ritual	Class
2nd	Icingdeath's Frost	Evocation	No	No	Sorcerer, Wizard
2nd	Nathair's Mischief	Illusion	Yes	No	Bard, Sorcerer, Wizard
3rd	Flame Stride	Transmutation	Yes	No	Artificer, Ranger, Sorcerer, Wizard
4th	Raulothim's Psychic Lance	Enchantment	No	No	Bard, Sorcerer, Warlock, Wizard
5th	Summon Draconic Spirit	Conjuration	Yes	No	Druid, Sorcerer, Wizard
6th	Fizban's Platinum Shield	Abjuration	Yes	No	Sorcerer, Wizard
7th	Draconic Transformation	Transmutation	Yes	No	Druid, Sorcerer, Wizard

Draconic Transformation

7th-level transmutation

Casting Time: 1 bonus action

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (a statuette of a dragon, worth at least 500 gp)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

With a roar, you draw on the magic of dragons to transform yourself, taking on various draconic features. You gain the following benefits until the spell ends:

- You have blindsight with a range of 30 feet. Within that range, you can effectively see anything that isn't behind total cover, even if you're blinded or in darkness. Moreover, you can see an invisible creature, unless the creature successfully hides from you.
- Incorporeal wings sprout from your back, giving you a flying speed of 40 feet.
- When you cast this spell, and as a bonus action on subsequent turns for the duration, you can exhale a breath of shimmering energy in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a Dexterity saving throw, taking 3d8 force damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.

Fizban's Platinum Shield

6th-level abjuration

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S, M (a platinum-plated dragon scale, worth at least 500 gp)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You create a field of silvery light that surrounds a creature of your choice within range (you can choose yourself). The field sheds dim light out to 5 feet.

As a bonus action on subsequent turns, you can move the field to another creature within 60 feet of the field.

The creature protected by the field gains the following benefits:

- The creature has half cover.
- The creature has resistance to acid, cold, fire, lightning, and poison damage.
- If the creature is subjected to an effect that allows it to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, the creature instead takes no damage if it succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if it fails.

Flame Stride

3rd-level transmutation

Casting Time: 1 bonus action

Range: Self

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

The billowing flames of a dragon cover your feet, granting you explosive speed. For the duration, your speed increases by 20 feet and moving doesn't provoke opportunity attacks.

When you move within 5 feet of a creature or object that isn't being worn or carried, it takes 1d6 fire damage from your trail of heat. A creature or object can take this damage only once during a turn.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 4th level or higher, increase your speed by 5 feet for each spell slot level above 3rd. Additionally, the spell deals an additional 1d6 fire damage for each slot level above 3rd.

Icingdeath's Frost

2nd-level evocation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self (15-foot cone)

Components: S, M (a vial of meltwater)

Duration: Instantaneous

A burst of icy cold energy emanates from you in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 3d8 cold damage and is covered in ice for 1 minute or until a creature uses its action to break the ice off itself or another creature. A creature covered in ice has

its speed reduced to 0. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage with no additional effects.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, increase the cold damage by 1d8 for each slot level above 2nd.

Nathair's Mischief

2nd-level illusion

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: S, M (a piece of crust from an apple pie)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You fill a 20-foot cube centered on a point you choose within range with fey and draconic magic. Roll on the Mischievous Surge table to determine the magical effect produced. At the start of each of your turns, you can move the cube up to 10 feet and reroll on the table.

Mischievous Surge

d4	Effect
1	The smell of apple pie fills the air, and each creature in the cube must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or become charmed by you until the start of your next turn.
2	Bouquets of flowers appear all around, and each creature in the cube must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw or be blinded until the start of your next turn as the flowers spray water in their faces.
3	Each creature in the cube must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or begin giggling until the start of your next turn. A giggling creature is incapacitated and uses all its movement to move in a random direction.
4	Drops of molasses appear and hover in the cube, turning it into difficult terrain until the start of your next turn.

Raulothim's Psychic Lance

4th-level enchantment

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 120 feet

Components: V

Duration: Instantaneous

You unleash a shimmering lance of psychic power from your forehead at a creature that you can see within range. Alternatively, you can utter

the creature's name. If the named target is within range, it gains no benefit from cover or invisibility as the lance homes in on it. If the named target isn't within range, the lance dissipates, and the spell slot is not expended.

The target must succeed on an Intelligence saving throw or take 10d6 psychic damage and be incapacitated until the start of your next turn.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 5th level or higher, the damage increases by 1d6 for each slot level above 4th.

Summon Draconic Spirit

5th-level conjuration

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S, M (an art object from a dragon's hoard, worth at least 500 gp)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

You call forth a draconic spirit. It manifests in an unoccupied space that you can see within range. This corporeal form uses the Draconic Spirit stat block. When you cast this spell, choose a family of dragon: Chromatic, Gem, or Metallic. The creature resembles a dragon of the chosen family, which determines certain traits in its stat block. The creature disappears when it drops to 0 hit points or when the spell ends.

The creature is an ally to you and your companions. In combat, the creature shares your initiative count, but it takes its turn immediately after yours. It obeys your verbal commands (no action required by you). If you don't issue any, it takes the Dodge action and uses its move to avoid danger.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 6th level or higher, use the higher level wherever the spell's level appears in the stat block.

Draconic Spirit

Large Dragon

Armor Class 14 + the level of the spell (natural armor)

Hit Points 50 + 10 for each spell level above 5th

Speed 30 ft., fly 80 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)

Damage Resistances (Chromatic and Metallic only)

acid, cold, fire, lightning, poison

Damage Resistances (Gem only) force, necrotic, psychic, radiant, thunder

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, poisoned

Senses blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Draconic, understands the languages you speak

Challenge — **Proficiency Bonus** equals your bonus

Shared Resistances. When you summon the dragon, choose one of its damage resistances. You have resistance to the chosen damage type until the spell ends.

Actions

Multiattack. The dragon uses its Breath Weapon, and it makes a number of Bite and Claw attacks equal to half the spell's level (rounded down).

Bite and Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* your spell attack modifier to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1d6 + 4 + the spell's level piercing damage.

Breath Weapon. The dragon exhales a stream of multicolored energy in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a Dexterity saving throw, taking 2d6 damage of your choice of a damage type this dragon has resistance to on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.



D&D Virtual Play Weekends

Chris Tulach discusses how to play D&D online every month, whether you're using Discord, Fantasy Grounds, Roll20, or Zoom.

MAY'S VIRTUAL PLAY WEEKEND!

If the time between Virtual Play Weekends usually passes by at the pace of a flail snail, then prepare to feel like you've been the target of a *haste* spell! That's because the gap between the April and May Virtual Play Weekends has been cut short to help support Jasper's Game Day. The suicide prevention and mental health charity is running a weeklong event that starts on April 30 and ends on May 7, 2021.

“We've moved the May weekend up to support Jasper's Game Day, the charity led by Fenway Jones. The Jasper's Game Week event concludes on May 7, 2021 and our Virtual Play Weekend organizer Baldman Games will then continue to support them through the

following days,” Chris Tulach, Product Manager for D&D Play, tells *Dragon+*.

“What’s exciting is that we’re not only supporting this wonderful cause, we also have a treat in store in the form of a preview adventure. We’re giving a special first-look at *The House of Lament* from *Van Richten’s Guide to Ravenloft*. It plays in about four hours, and \$5 from each ticket sold will be donated by our organizer to Jasper’s Game Day.”

Each *The House of Lament* ticket automatically includes a donation, with all of that price increase going to Jasper’s Game Day. That allows the DMs who run those games at May’s Virtual Play Weekend to still be paid for their time. In addition, players participating might earn a little something special for future use in the *Ravenloft: Mist Hunters* D&D Adventurers League campaign, debuting at the July Virtual Play Weekend, but Chris couldn’t say what just yet.

“If you’re running *The House of Lament* at home, it might be a two-session adventure, spending anywhere between four and eight hours playing it,” Tulach explains. “Design Lead F. Wesley Schneider created a ‘critical path’ cut of this adventure so we can run it as a four-hour experience while still delivering all the major beats. It’s a great way for us to give people a sneak peek, have them play through a really great adventure, and raise money at the same time.”

As discussed in our [March preview](#), the Virtual Play Weekends are also looking to take a leaf out of the *D&D Live* and *D&D Celebration* playbooks by hosting panel discussions. These will focus on advice for Dungeon Masters, as content creators and community influencers offer their expert tips and tricks.

“Our first video in this new companion series is called ‘*Setting the Mood*’” says Chris. “It features a cast of experienced DMs who are experts in providing immersive game experiences, and discussion around how to fully transport your players to your world. Some of our participants are well-known in the streaming community.”

And for even more on Ravenloft, check out this issue’s In The Works section to learn more about *Ravenloft: Mist Hunters*. This D&D Adventurers League campaign set in Ravenloft kicks off on July 9, 2021 as part of that month’s Virtual Play Weekend!

The next **[D&D Virtual Play Weekend](#)** takes place on May 7-9, 2021. You can register on or after April 23 and buy tickets at **[The Yawning Portal](#)**, find more player and general event information at the **[Baldman Games website](#)**, and find Dungeon Master information **[here](#)**.

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Streaming Highlights

This issue's streams showcase D&D personalities, a Ravenloft excursion, and a personal memoir of the power of storytelling...



Dragon Talk

Every week the doors of the Dungeons & Dragons castle are flung open and Shelly Mazzanoble and Greg Tito invite the audience inside for exclusive interviews and previews! They sit down with celebrities and pop culture personalities to talk about the latest phenomena in roleplaying, video games, comics, novels, movies, and television. And the *Dragon Talk* team have collected a few March 2021 highlights to enjoy:

[Watch the March Highlights](#)

Chrissy Costanza features as part of those highlights and the Against the Current lead singer talked to Shelly and Greg about her

experiences as a new Dungeons & Dragons player. Not that she's entirely new to the dragon part. Almost 12 million people have now watched **Chrissy's performance** at the opening ceremony for the *League of Legends* 2017 World Championship Finals, which includes a guest appearance from a spectacular CGI dragon.



Chrissy's first D&D experience came on her Venn chat show *Guest House*, where DM **Sara Thompson** led Chrissy, Anna Prosser, and actor and presenter Jimmy Wong on a quest. Jimmy himself popped up on a separate episode of *Dragon Talk* to discuss his role as a soldier in the Disney live-action film *Mulan*, including weapons and armor that would be the envy of any D&D fan.

“It was very uncomfortable,” he admits. “I don’t know how people did it back in the day. The armor’s pretty heavy even though it’s not made of real metal, and the swords we have are all PVC. It’s kind of like LARPing in a way.”



Another guest bringing those levels of realism is Christoff Visscher of **Cantrip Candles**. He may not be supplying the tactile experience of a costume, but his use of scents helps bring Dungeons & Dragons alive.

“We use a range of senses to immerse ourselves in D&D, whether that’s sounds or the tactile experience of a map or a piece of parchment,” Shelly says. “Christoff is very big on ambience and setting the scene as a Dungeon Master. And smell can be such an important part of that. His candles are designed to make you feel like you’re inside a dungeon or you’re smelling what Waterdeep smells like.”



Elsewhere, comedian Rufus Hound secured his chapter in the planned *Dragon Talk* book with an emotional story. His D&D journey finally began thanks to a chance meeting at a wedding, having wanted to play for years. And *Questing Time* allowed him to bring feelings from deep within his subconscious to the surface.

“In the game he has an axe that can take all of his pain,” Greg explains. “And he was inspired to write a poem about this axe and send it off to a folk musician friend to put it to music. When he got that MP3 back, the resulting song made him break down and realize that he his subconscious was telling him to get help.”



Mark Hulmes, Chris Perkins and Chris Lindsay (“Always a great interview,” says Shelly), and WizKids minis painter Vee Mus’e, among many others!

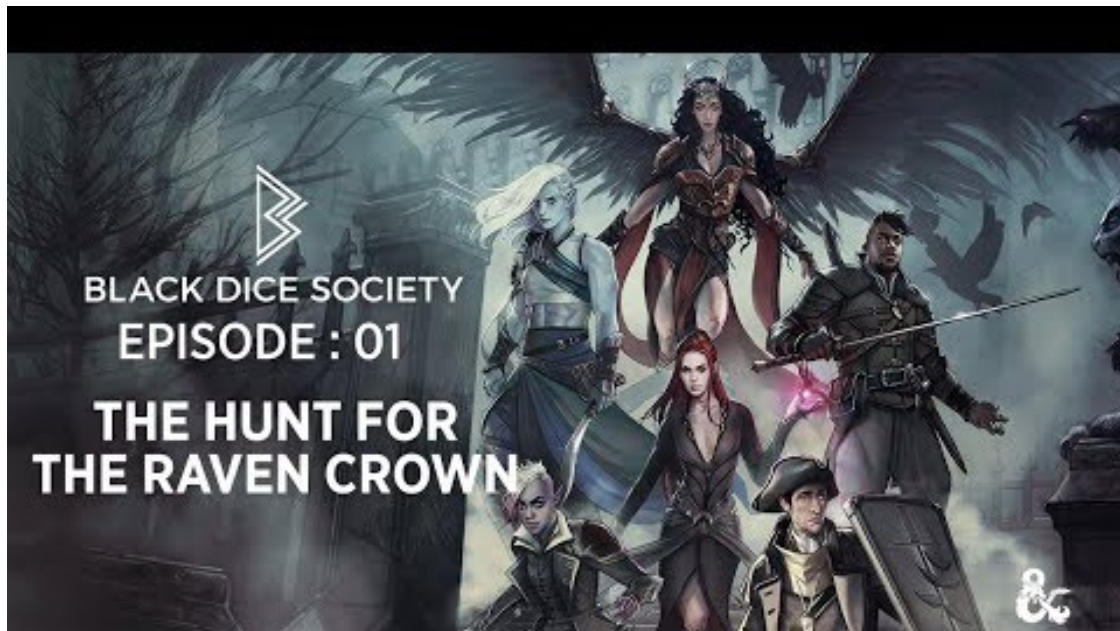
New episodes of *Dragon Talk*, the official Dungeons & Dragons podcast, release every week and you can [listen here](#) or [watch here](#).

HEADING: Black Dice Society

“Getting to work on this show with these people really is a dream come true,” says Dungeon Master B. Dave Walters. “I’ve been playing D&D for pretty much my entire life and I’ve been playing vampire games for almost as long. Having the opportunity to combine my love of D&D and my love of dark supernatural horror has been a joy. Hopefully, everybody’s going to really enjoy it and we’ll get to keep going for a long time.”

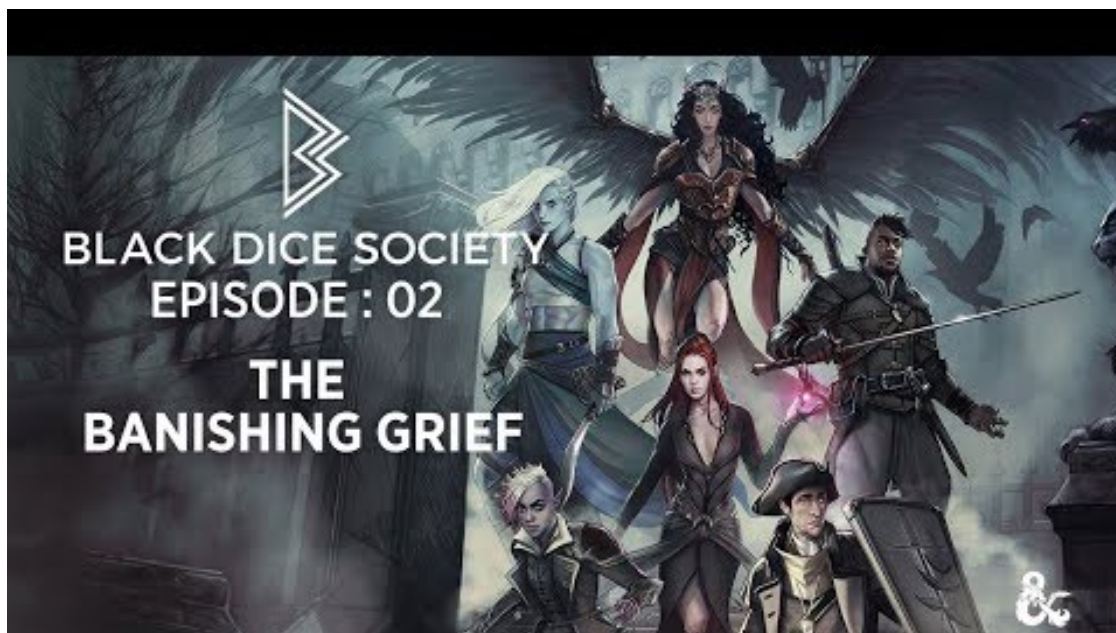
Black Dice Society kicked off at Gary Con XIII with an [Episode 0.5](#) that borrowed elements of *The House of Lament* adventure from *Van Richten’s Guide to Ravenloft*. “That session introduced the game, the characters, and the world,” he says. “One of the joys of Ravenloft is

that dreams and visions aren't lazy storytelling. Having previously brought them all together in that introduction, which seemed like a weird dream, it was much easier for me to bond them together again and give them that moment of familiarity in episode one."



Walters gave the cast free rein to create whichever character they wanted, stressing they should build someone who's in Ravenloft because they deserve to be there. With two **reborn** and a **dhampir** among their number, they've captured the vibe perfectly.

"They're not heroes. Ravenloft does not trap good people. But that doesn't mean they can't still do heroic things, and that's the line," he says, adding that Mark Meer's character might be the exception. "Mark's adamant that Brother Uriah is good. He asked me if good people can be born in the mists and my response was, 'I guess we're gonna find out!'"



If anywhere can prove the character of Brother Uriah, it's Ravenloft's Domains of Dread. With a strong horror vibe running throughout *Black Dice Society*, mettle will be tested and pulses will be raised.

“The tone of horror in general and gothic horror in particular is atmosphere. It's pressure. It's the thing that goes bump in the night. The screeching noise you can't identify. It's what you don't see. And you can rush that,” Walters explains. “But it has to be balanced as an element of storytelling, expanding and contracting. Human beings are incapable of staying in a highly emotional state for two or three hours at a time. We cannot stay terrified indefinitely.

“These days we have safety and consent so players can identify things they don't want to see in a game. And there have been a couple of times already when we've bumped up against those conditions and I've had to tell them in advance, without any spoilers, that something might be about to happen.”



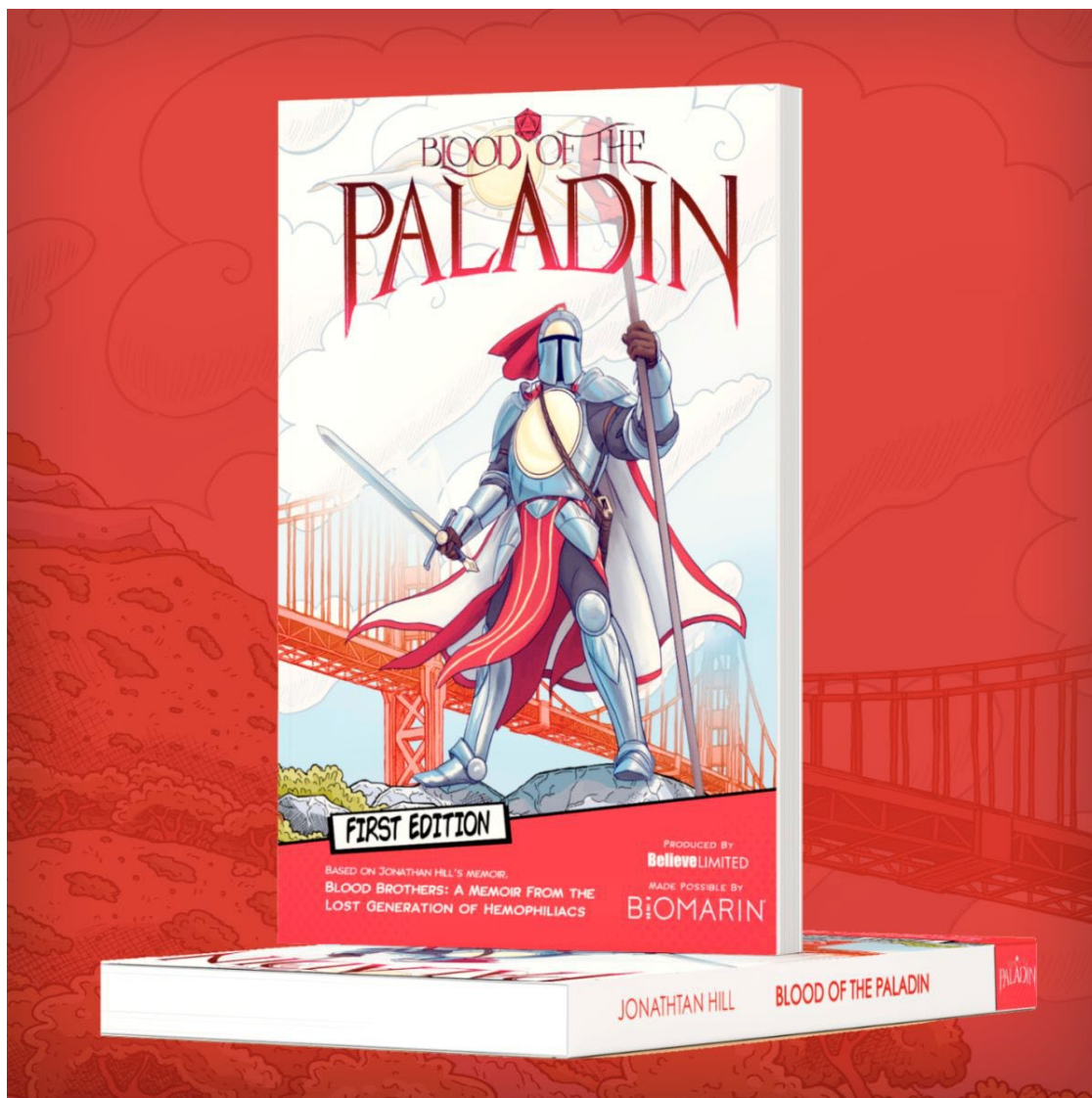
Walters is hoping he may soon get to issue those warnings in person if the *Black Dice Society* cast get to play together in a live game.

“Part of why I spent so much money on my costume is because someday I’ll be in the same room with these people. Four members of our cast are in L.A.—myself, Becca Scott, Saige Ryan, and Noura Ibrahim are all within ten minutes of each other. But Mark is up in Canada, Tanya DePass is in Chicago, and DeeJay Knight is in Texas. So live con experiences are the best shot at us all being in one room.”

***Black Dice Society* airs every Thursday at 4pm PT / 7pm ET on the *Dungeons & Dragons* YouTube channel.**

Blood of the Paladin

Jonathan Hill captured his personal experiences with the bleeding disorder hemophilia in the book *Blood Brothers: A Memoir From the Lost Generation of Hemophiliacs*. He’s now translated that story into a graphic novel, *Blood of the Paladin*, which has itself been turned into an **eight-part podcast**. Jonathan found a love of Dungeons & Dragons in the 1980s and credits the game with sparing him some of the pain of his illness.



What is hemophilia and how does it affect your everyday life?

It's a genetic disorder, passed from mother to son. These bleeding disorders cause a chronic illness that has to be addressed medically and psychologically, which is what I've written about. Concussions or head trauma can be extremely life-threatening for someone with a bleeding disorder.

How has playing Dungeons & Dragons helped you escape the challenges of that condition?

One of the things I discovered early on was the power of my imagination to help me cope with my chronic condition. It was an excellent way to open a doorway that allowed some degree of escape to drown out the pain and suffering. My friends and I have loved Dungeons & Dragons since we grew up in the 1980s. You sit around a table and tell a story together and have no limitations. That whole world was open to me, even when I was stuck in a hospital bed.

Does your graphic novel *Blood of the Paladin* blend your life story and the fantasy world of D&D?

The graphic novel is based on the memoir that I wrote about living with the serious repercussions of my bleeding disorder and other conditions. I really wanted to raise awareness about the challenges people with a bleeding disorder face each and every day. *Blood of the Paladin* is a blend of events that happened to me, mixed with stories of how important my friends were to me, and how we bonded together over our love of Dungeons & Dragons.

***Blood of the Paladin* has also been turned into a podcast. What does that format offer?**

It's an eight-episode series that includes a dramatic reading of the graphic novel by actors, as well as several interviews with myself and others who are depicted in the graphic novel. It explains the connection that my friends, family, and I had, showing how together we were able to face these challenges.

What do you hope people will take away from your story?

When I started writing this, there wasn't a pandemic. A lot of the strategies and tools that I developed to cope with and manage my bleeding disorders are also relevant when you're dealing with the pain and suffering of loneliness and isolation. Using your imagination or having another kind of expression, whether it's gardening, reading, writing or music, are great ways to move beyond those things.

The free graphic novel *Blood of the Paladin* can be ordered at the [official website](#) and the eight-part podcast is [available here](#).

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Brian Perry

Our introduction to members of the D&D Team and their roles continues with the Director of Franchise Marketing.

The D&D Team relishes the opportunity to work on the world's greatest roleplaying game. And we're also aware there are a fair number of folks interested in learning more about entering the gaming industry professionally.



Brian Perry (select to view)

With that in mind, each issue we'll chat with D&D staff from a diverse set of roles to find out how they came to be valued members of our party, while learning what advice they have for someone who might be looking to follow a similar path.

Brian Perry, Director of Franchise Marketing, follows [Chris Tulach](#), [Brandy Camel](#), and [Dan Tovar](#) into our *zone of truth*.

Where in Faerûn or the wider multiverse do you hail from?

I'm originally from Washington D.C. but I live in Seattle now. My parents were in the Foreign Service so I spent most of my life outside of the US and have lived in Ireland, Russia, Jamaica, the country of Georgia, Panama, and Sweden.

What is your character class?

I'm the Director of Franchise Marketing for Dungeons & Dragons. My team is in charge of planning all the marketing messaging for the tabletop roleplaying game and D&D video games, and will eventually cover entertainment as well. If it currently has to do with Dungeons & Dragons, and we need to market it to players, my team is involved in that.

What made you want to join this party?

I've been playing video games since I can first remember. During my childhood I played pretty much any RPG I could get my hands on, so I'm a huge fan. Those were mostly computer games but even though I hadn't played Dungeons & Dragons at that point, I had this love for it, because it influenced so many of the games that I grew up with. When I had the opportunity to move to the Dungeons & Dragons team in June 2020, I immediately took it. It fits with my passion.

When did you first play D&D?

I didn't start playing Dungeons & Dragons until 2014 with the launch of fifth edition, but I fell in love with it immediately. I've been playing in the same weekly campaign for four years and the amazing thing is that we're not even a quarter of the way through that adventure.

I like character classes that have a lot of tricks up their sleeves, so I've enjoyed playing a lot of casters. I hadn't played a rogue until recently and I've found that class to be very fun outside of combat, with the bag of tricks their abilities provide. But I usually start with the character background before I choose the class. I love building characters with really intricate backstories.



How can those interested in this kind of role level up?

There's no easy button to press so be prepared to put in the hard work. I've never heard of anyone who went to college and then went to work at their dream gaming company. If you want to get into gaming, get involved in gaming communities and show what you can bring to the table. If no one is hiring you to do the work you want to

do, find ways to do that work anyways and build your portfolio and experience. There is a luck component to working in this industry. But if you've put in the hard work, it's much easier to grab onto opportunities when they fly by you.

Wherever you're working, keep doing a great job. But don't only focus on your current job responsibilities. If you have a passion for other areas, think about how you can evolve your role to include those passions.

My very first job out of college was cold calling press to pitch products like heartburn medication, which was difficult to be excited about. I knew I wanted to get more into the digital space, so I told the company I could help the web team on one of their projects. In truth, I didn't know how to build websites yet. But I was passionate to learn and dove in headfirst, spending long hours teaching myself as I went, alongside my regular work. Within a year, I transitioned to being a part of the digital team.

What character background led to you getting the job?

I graduated college in 2009 so I've been in marketing for 12 years now. I worked at a marketing/PR firm for the first five years and dealt with every kind of client you could think of: from tech and energy, to car companies, education, and nonprofits. I had to wear many hats in my work. At one point, I was leading various web, community, social, design, digital marketing, and paid media campaigns. I like to say that I learned to be an octopus, because octopuses can meld themselves and change to fit any situation.

But I always wanted to work in gaming and that happened with a mixture of luck and hard work. Game creation engine *Project Spark* was coming out for the Xbox in 2013 and I was a huge fan of it. I joined the online community and was very active in the forums. I heard *Project Spark* was going to be at PAX East and they were looking for volunteers to help at the Xbox booth. I was already going to PAX so I said I'd be happy to help out for a few hours. That then turned into me being at their booth as a volunteer that whole weekend. By the end of the show, I was giving talks to fans on their stage.



Your browser can't play this video.
[Learn more](#)

I didn't go to PAX East thinking it would land me a job at Xbox. I went there because I was really passionate about *Project Spark* and I wanted to share that love and educate people about it. But if I hadn't been at that show, I don't think I would ever have gotten into gaming. That's where people saw I had something to say about games.

Based on that experience, they wanted to hire me to work at Xbox. I got the call while I was on my honeymoon. After my wife and I got back from Hawaii, we had to decide whether we were going to move across the country and take on gaming. I packed the car and literally drove across the country—it was the first time I'd ever been to Seattle. And that was the start of my journey.

At Xbox I worked on *Project Spark* and then spent a bit of time in Microsoft Research. When I saw the job opening at Wizards of the Coast, I knew I had to apply as I was such a fan of all its properties. I might be new to the Dungeons & Dragons team, but I've been at Wizards of the Coast for five and a half years now, working on *Magic: The Gathering*, which I've played since 1999. But I always had in the back of my mind that if I got a chance to work on RPGs, that would be my dream job.

What's a typical session like?

My average day is half meetings, a quarter responding to emails, and the rest is big picture thinking. When you get to Director level in marketing, there are a lot of meetings. You're looking across all of the products and thinking about the tone of the brand and the values of Dungeons & Dragons and where we need to go from here. All of that requires talking with a lot of people, and hearing them speak, so

you can figure out how you're going to tell the next five years of Dungeons & Dragons stories in a single slide.

Are you also heavily involved on the digital side, on video games such as *Dark Alliance*?

I guess I'm the quarterback or the orchestra conductor. My job is to give clarity, make sure everyone focuses on what's really important, and then let each of the team members do their great things. And I'm also the Interim Marketing Lead on *Dark Alliance*, so I'm directly leading all marketing for that video game (P.S. we're hiring).

We're finally talking about *Dark Alliance* now with our community so I have to keep abreast of every single facet of it, as we have new assets coming out every week. Our team of passionate developers is making these incredible dev diary videos that help introduce the game to players in a more honest way than you're used to seeing. I'm working with the creative team on A LOT of trailers we'll release over the weeks. Our PR team pitches news to the press, so we make sure we have a compelling story to tell each week. We're leading with our passion and I have oversight on all of that.



(Select to view)

Is multiclassing required?

For my whole career I've loved being that octopus who gets to touch every facet of marketing. And in this job, I really get to do that. I'm not in a silo where I'm working on a single project, I get to work with people on every single marketing team and really focus on the things that I think are going to be important for a product.

What's your coolest artifact?

The coolest thing on my desk is Alexa, which controls my voice-

activated LED lights. I have a light setup when I want to move into work mode, for example. I can change the whole mood of the room by saying, ‘Alexa, focus’ or ‘Alexa, meeting’.

What do you like best about this party role?

There’s never a dull moment. And it’s really important to me in any job that I’m learning new things every day. Because if I’m not, then I must have hit some sort of plateau. And the underlying passion, of course, is that I get to work on video games. As a huge gamer myself, I’ve seen a lot of games marketing that feels inauthentic. It speaks to me that I have the chance to work on messaging, materials, and creative and have an impact on that. I never get bored of it.

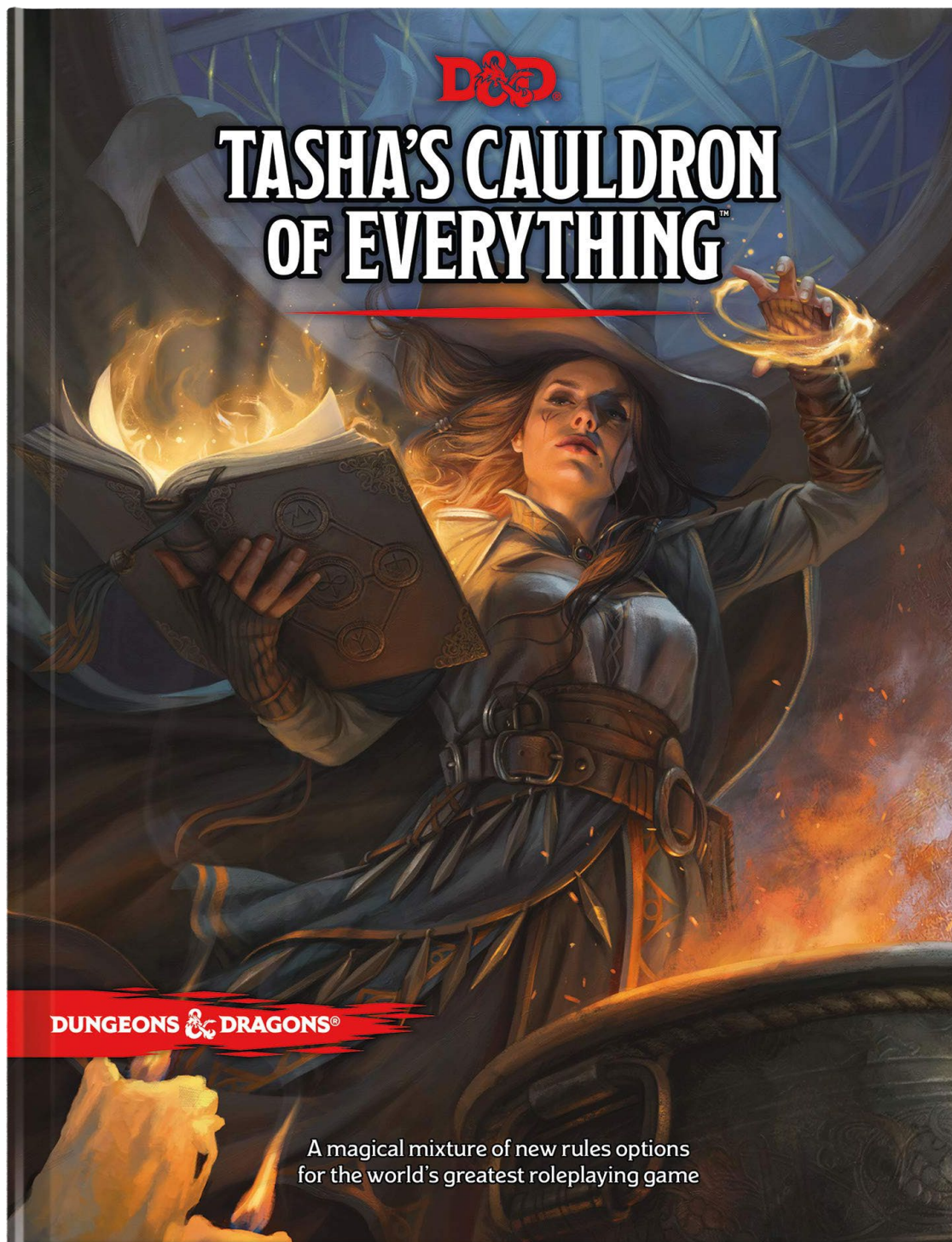
Have there been any surprise rounds?

The biggest surprise came at the beginning of my role on the D&D Team. I’ve worked at Wizards of the Coast for quite a while , so I know the company well and I expected it to be a seamless transition. But moving from *Magic: The Gathering* to Dungeons & Dragons is like moving to a different company. These two brands are totally different beasts. I almost had to relearn everything again from the ground up.

And because the transition happened during lockdown, I was walking into a new online chat, rather than a new building. The people I’m working with like to joke that most of us have never met each other from the legs down.

Which moments have been worthy of retelling by bards?

Getting a chance to work on *Tasha’s Cauldron of Everything*, as that was my very first D&D project. I started by looking at the history that led to its creation. It was made hand in hand with the community, who helped us build it and test it, and that’s a really positive, authentic thing we could lean into.



(Select to view)

We partnered with different members of our community that we knew would be passionate about the book, and gave them the opportunity to preview it in their own voice. I think that really helped us explain to players what is important about this book. I was really impressed by how the team embraced that, even though we'd never done anything like it before. The initial kernel that started with *Tasha's Cauldron* will continue to ripple across our books.

Which figure gives you inspiration?

I've had the luxury throughout my career of never having a bad boss. And my bosses have all taught me something different. At Xbox, my boss' job was to remove barriers for his team. I'd never seen someone who's only role was to help their team get rid of problems and not to be a barrier themselves. That changed my perspective on how you could manage a team.

On *Magic: The Gathering*, I had a boss who preached that, at the end of the day, the players are all that matter. And if you keep on thinking about the players, and everything that you're building is based around what they want, that's going to win out. That helped me build the kind of marketing plans that, as a gamer, I would want to be marketed to me.

Who rolls best for Performance?

I listen religiously to *IGN Unfiltered*. It's a monthly podcast where they sit down with luminaries in the video game industry and talk to them about their history.



What are your downtime activities?

I love gaming and RPGs in general. Whenever a new RPG comes out, I consume it completely. I'm almost done with *Cyberpunk 2077*, which is actually a pretty fun game. Being a semi-completionist, I've been doing all the side quests, and I now only have to finish the main quest.

**You can hear more from Brian Perry and connect with him on
[Twitter](#).**



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Next Issue: Dragon+ 38

Magic is in the air as we go behind the first Dungeons & Dragons-themed MTG set...



When *Dragon+* returns in June we'll be looking ahead to the launch of *Magic: The Gathering—Adventures in the Forgotten Realms*. As part of our coverage of the first Dungeons & Dragons-themed *MTG* set, we'll chat with gaming luminaries about the influence D&D had on the collectable card game.

There'll also be more incredible characters from our dynamic duo, Adam Lee and Max Dunbar, as some familiar faces show up in their *Character Spotlight*. Meanwhile, illustrator and concept artist Shawn Wood enters our *zone of truth* as we chart his career path in *Gather Your Party*.

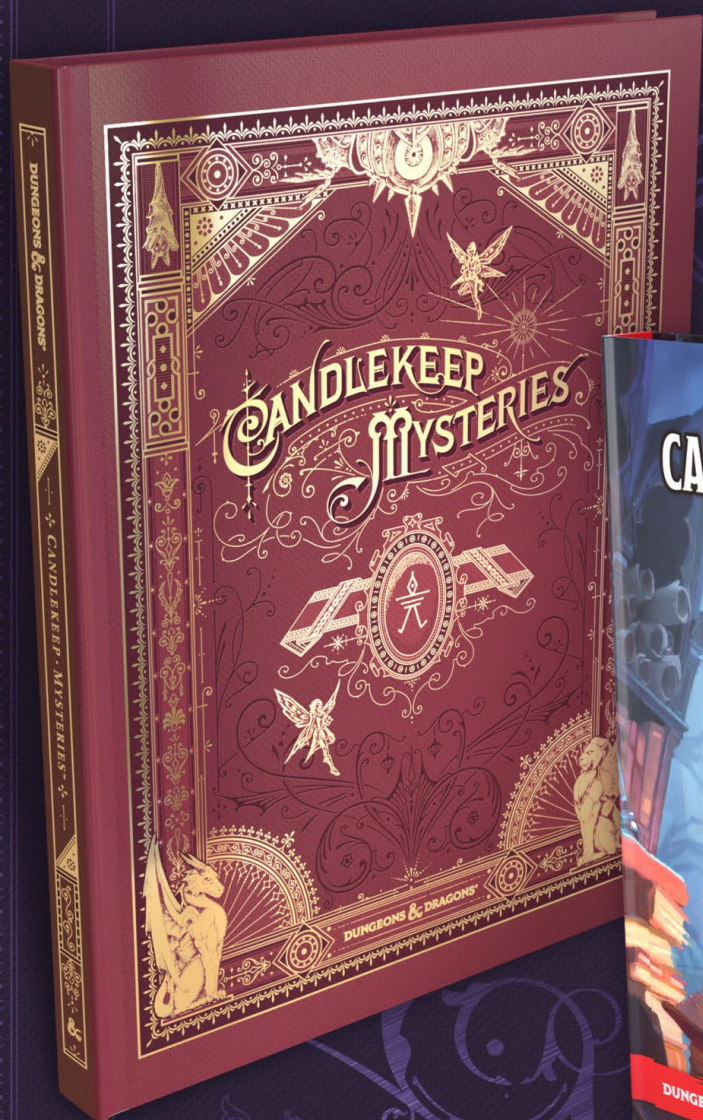
There's all this, plus more exclusive previews, all of our regulars such as *Streaming Highlights*, another delve into the imposing *Dragon* archive, the latest updates on *Dark Alliance*, the Adventurers League, and Virtual Play Weekends, and much, *much* more!

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GREAT BOOKS

HIDE THEIR SECRETS WELL



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A big *Dragon+* welcome to Kara Kenna, who joins us as Art Director!

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